

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Eric Washington

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Washington, Eric Tyson, 1953-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 23, 2014 and September 26, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:16:29).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Chief appellate judge The Honorable Eric Washington (1953 - ) was appointed to the Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals by President Clinton in 1999. He became chief judge in 2005. Washington was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 23, 2014 and September 26, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_274
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chief Judge Eric Tyson Washington was born on December 2, 1953, in Jersey City, New Jersey to Gloria Simkins Washington, a social worker, and Eleby Rudolph Washington, a surgeon. He was raised in Newark, New Jersey and attended high school in Maplewood, New Jersey. Washington graduated from Tufts University in 1976 and received his J.D. degree from Columbia University's School of Law in 1979. Washington began his law career in 1979 at the offices of Fulbright & Jaworski in Houston, Texas. The company is one of the largest law firms in the United States with nearly 1,000 attorneys in over fifty different practice areas. Washington soon relocated to Washington, D.C. to serve as Legislative Director and Counsel to U.S. Congressman Michael A. Andrews of Texas, before assuming a position in the Washington, D.C. branch of Fulbright & Jaworski.

In 1987, Washington served as Special Counsel to the Corporation Counsel, and later as Principal Deputy Corporation Counsel in Washington, D.C. After stepping down from this position in 1989, Washington became a partner at Hogan & Hartson, the oldest major law firm headquartered in Washington, D.C., and remained there until 1995, when he was appointed to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. As an associate judge in the Superior Court, he presided over various criminal trials as well as cases from the Drug Court, Domestic Violence Unit, tax and probate matters on certification from other judges, and cases involving children who were victims of abuse and neglect. Washington was appointed to the Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals by President Bill Clinton in 1999, and six years later, the District of Columbia Judicial Nominations Commission designated Washington to serve a four-year term as Chief Judge of the Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals, preceding Judge Annice Wagner.

Washington has previously served as Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Leadership Council for the District of Columbia Courts and is also a member of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Access to the Courts. Washington serves on many civic organizations as well, including the Board of Directors for the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington and the Boys and Girls Club Foundation.

Chief Judge Eric Washington was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 26, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Eric Washington was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 23, 2014 and September 26, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chief appellate judge The Honorable Eric Washington (1953 - ) was appointed to the Washington, D.C. Court of Appeals by President Clinton in 1999. He became chief judge in 2005.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Washington, Eric Tyson, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Washington, Eric Tyson, 1953- --Interviews

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African American judges--Interviews

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# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Washington (D.C.)

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# Occupations:

Chief Appellate Judge

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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# Administrative Information

## Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

## Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, May 23, 2014 and September 26, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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# Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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# Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_001\_001,  
TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Eric Washington was born on December 2, 1953 in Jersey City, New Jersey to Gloria Simkins Washington and Eleby Washington, Jr. The history of his maternal ancestors in Edgefield, South Carolina was documented in Orville Vernon Burton's "In My Father's House, There Are Many Mansions."

Washington's maternal grandfather graduated from Howard Dental School in Washington, D.C, opened one of the first black dental practices in Greensboro, South Carolina, and taught at North Carolina A&T State University.

Washington's mother graduated from the Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina and Bennett College in Greensboro, obtaining her master's degree in Social Work from the Atlanta University (AU) Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Washington's paternal great-grandmother was Mary Washington. His paternal grandfather, Eleby Washington, Sr., was a blacksmith and a laborer.

Washington's paternal grandmother, Florrie Washington was an educator.

Washington's father graduated from Howard University Medical School.

African American dentists.

Palmer Memorial Institute (Sedalia, N.C.).

Edgefield (S.C.)--Race relations--History--19th century.

African American families--South Carolina--Edgefield.

African American families--North Carolina--Greensboro.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Eric Washington recounts how his parents may have met and describes his parents' personalities. His father was an orthopedic surgeon who had his own practice in Newark, New Jersey, which was attached to the family home.

Washington's earliest childhood memory is of sharing his birthday cake with his older brother. He grew up on a quiet corner of Madison Avenue and South 11th Street in Newark. Initially mixed, the neighborhood turned predominantly black after the 1967 Newark Riots. Washington attended Madison Avenue Junior High School as a child and enjoyed both school and sports. Tennis was his favorite sport and he recalls meeting Althea Gibson. Other sports heroes were Arthur Ashe, Jim Brown, and Bill Russell. He also took music lessons, but did not enjoy them. As a young boy, Washington looked up to professional role models in his family's circle. Washington recalls his favorite television shows and his commute to Newark Academy, a private, majority school in Livingston, New Jersey.

Newark (N.J.)--History--20th century.

African American surgeons--New Jersey--Newark.

African American families--New Jersey--Newark.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:28:38 ?

Eric Washington attended Newark Academy in Livingston, New Jersey during the 1960s. As a young boy, he participated in the Boy Scouts through Trinity Methodist Church in Newark, New Jersey until his family moved to Maplewood, New Jersey after the 1967 Newark Riots. Washington developed a black consciousness under the influence of leaders like Imamu Amiri Baraka. He recalls his parents' participation in the Civil Rights Movement and their support of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many of Washington's role models as a youth were family friends like Gus Heningburg, an architect and strategist. In Maplewood, New Jersey, Washington attended Columbia High School, a

majority white school where he played tennis and basketball. Along with another black student, he was elected president and vice president of the senior class before graduating in 1972. Washington talks about his father's view of lawyers and his decision to attend Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts after a memorable campus visit.

Civil rights movements--New Jersey--Newark--History--20th century.

Newark (N.J.)--Race relations--History--20th century.

Riots--New Jersey--Newark--History--20th century.

Baraka, Imamu Amiri, 1934-.

Tufts University--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Eric Washington describes his experience at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. At Tufts, Washington lived in the Africana House and also worked to connect residents of Boston's Roxbury and Jamaica Plain neighborhoods to university resources. Washington also played on the Tufts basketball team as a point guard behind Ed Tapscott. His experience at Tufts confirmed his desire to become a lawyer. He then enrolled in law school after graduating with a political science degree in 1976. Washington describes the racial animus in the Boston area that influenced his decision to attend Columbia Law School in New York City, New York. Influential instructors during Washington's years at Columbia included Kellis E. Parker, the only African American law professor on faculty. Washington joined Fulbright & Jaworski in Houston, Texas after graduating from Columbia Law School in 1979, drawn by the firm's litigation training program. In 1983, he left the firm to work for U.S. Congressman Michael A. Andrews.

Racism--Massachusetts--Boston.

School integration--Massachusetts--Boston.

Columbia University. School of Law.

African American neighborhoods--Massachusetts--Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Eric Washington left Fulbright & Jaworski in 1983 to become U.S. Congressman Michael A. Andrews' Legislative Director and Counsel in Washington, D.C. After two and a half years, he returned to Fulbright & Jaworski at the firm's D.C. office. In 1987, Washington became Special Counsel to the Corporation Counsel of the District of Columbia under Frederick Cooke, and rose to the position of Principal Deputy Corporation Counsel. He talks about Texas politicians Mickey Leland and Barbara Jordan, and HistoryMaker Lee P. Brown's tenure as Houston's chief of police. He also talks about the 1980 presidential campaign, the impact of the Reagan Administration on judicial office in Texas, and President Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1990, Washington joined Hogan & Hartson, the oldest law firm in Washington, D.C. He was also an active participant in local Democratic politics and became Chair of the Democratic Party in D.C. In 1994, he was nominated to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by President Bill Clinton.

Lawyers--Texas--Houston.

Texas--Politics and government.

United States--Politics and government.

Andrews, Michael A., 1944-.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_006,  
TRT: 6:31:28 ?

Eric Washington talks about representing the District of Columbia government, first as Special Counsel and then as Principal Deputy Corporation Counsel until 1987. He recalls corruption charges brought against Mayor Marion Barry and Mayor Walter Washington. Washington also describes Mayor Marion Barry's legal counsel, Herbert O. Reid, Sr. Washington then worked at the oldest law firm in Washington, D.C., Hogan & Hartson from 1990 to 1995. While at the firm, Washington became involved with President Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign as the Chair of the D.C. Democratic State Committee. He discusses Bill Clinton's reputation as the nation's first black president and compares President Clinton's political appointments to those of the HistoryMaker President Barack Obama. In 1994, Washington was nominated to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia by President Clinton. He also talks about the impact of Washington, D.C.'s limited tax base.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_007,  
TRT: 7:30:13 ?

Eric Washington describes how the financial difficulties in Washington, D.C. were exacerbated by the capitol's limited tax base. From the time he was a child, family friends like Judges Herbert Tate, Harry Hazelwood, and John Tear were role models and mentors for Washington. In 1994, Washington was nominated to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. He talks about the nomination process, presidential judicial appointments, and his duties on the Superior Court after he was confirmed in 1995. Washington also outlines the history of African Americans in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, including Eugene Hamilton and HistoryMaker Paul Webber. While on the Superior Court, Washington served on the Standing Committee on Fairness and Access to the District of Columbia Courts, which worked to combat racial and gender biases in court. He worked to improve the court's domestic violence program. Washington talks about drug sentencing guidelines in the nation's capital.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_008,  
TRT: 8:28:41 ?

Eric Washington was appointed to the D.C. Court of Appeals in 1999 by President Bill Clinton. On the court, Washington's served as the co-chair of the Strategic Planning Leadership Council and also co-chaired the Quality Service Council with Chief Judge William Pryor. He talks about Annice Wagner, who served over two terms as Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals and oversaw the establishment of the Standing Committee on Fairness and Access, which gave rise to the Access to Justice Commission on which Washington served. Washington also talks about Peter Edelman's leadership of the Access to Justice Commission before turning to his own appointment of Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals in 2005. He recalls the unanimous support his candidacy received amongst his colleagues and describes his vision for the court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_009,  
TRT: 9:30:59 ?

Eric Washington was appointed Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals in 2005. He describes the court's educational outreach to law students and its attempts to promote transparency by holding open court cases. Washington describes the potential merits of live streaming oral arguments for public viewing and outlines the judicial process in the Court of Appeals. Washington also talks about the court's nine appellate judges, and describes how it differs from the two-tiered trial courts in other states. Washington reflects upon the role

of DNA evidence in trial courts.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_010,  
TRT: 10:29:04 ?

Eric Washington was elected President of the Conference of Chief Justices in 2011. The Conference was established by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger as a consortium of chief judges from the highest courts in the United States. As president, Washington has worked to address overt and unconscious racial and ethnic biases, and to improve language access in the courtroom. He talks about mass incarceration across the country and presents ideas to reform the American criminal justice system through measures such as evidence-based sentencing. In 2013, Washington began his third consecutive term as Chief Judge of the D.C. Court of Appeals. He reflects upon his tenure so far and whether he would do anything differently as a judge. Washington begins to detail the history of the Historic Courthouse in Washington, D.C., which is on both the National Registry of Historic Places and the National Underground Railroad Registry.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Eric Washington, Section A2007\_274\_002\_011,  
TRT: 11:19:12 ?

Eric Washington continues to describe the history of the Historic Courthouse in Washington, D.C from its construction in 1820 to the trial of abolitionist Captain Daniel Drayton who was later pardoned by President Millard Fillmore. The Courthouse also reputedly played a role in the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and was the site of President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the D.C. Emancipation and Compensation Act. Washington also talks about upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his professional legacy, his family, and how he would like to be remembered.