

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Tyrone Brown

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Brown, Tyrone, 1942-   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | March 6, 2012  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2012   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 14 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:37:00).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Telecommunications lawyer Tyrone Brown (1942 - ) was appointed by former President Jimmy Carter to serve on the Federal Communications Commission. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 6, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2012_062  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Communications attorney and broadcasting executive Tyrone Brown was born in Norfolk, Virginia on November 5, 1942. He graduated from East Orange High School in New Jersey in 1960. Brown received his A.B. degree from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York in 1964. He went on to earn his L.L.B. degree from Cornell University Law School in Ithaca, New York in 1967. During that year, Brown also served as a law clerk to former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren.

From 1968 to 1970, Brown worked as an associate with the Washington D.C. law firm of Covington & Burling. He was also a special investigator for the President's Commission on Campus Unrest in 1970. From 1970 to 1971, he served as assistant to Senator Edmund S. Muskie, then as staff director of the Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee of the Senate Government Operations Committee. Brown then served as director and vice president for legal affairs of Post-Newsweek Stations, Inc. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed Brown to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to succeed Benjamin Hooks, the second African American appointed to the United States government regulatory agency. Brown worked as a commissioner with the FCC for three years before stepping down in 1981. He returned to private practice law when he worked for the firms Steptoe & Johnson and Wiley Rein, LLP. After teaching journalism classes at Duke University, Brown headed the Media Access Project, a non-profit, public interest law firm and advocacy organization working in communications policy. In 2009, Brown became the founding member and vice chairman of the board for IRIDIUM Satellite LLC. Brown has also served as principal outside counsel for *Black Entertainment Television* (BET).

Brown is former chair of the Washington Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and a director of the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council. He has been featured in *Ebony*, *Jet* and *Black Enterprise* magazines.

Tyrone Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 5, 2012.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Tyrone Brown was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 6, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 14 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Telecommunications lawyer Tyrone Brown (1942 - ) was appointed by former President Jimmy Carter to serve on the Federal Communications Commission.

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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:

Brown, Tyrone, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Brown, Tyrone, 1942- --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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## Occupations:

Telecommunications Lawyer

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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 Tyrone Brown, March 6, 2012. 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 Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:32 ?

Tyrone Brown was born on November 5, 1942 in Norfolk, Virginia. His mother, Julia Goodman Brown, was born in 1923 near Franklin, Virginia. His father, Madison Doles Brown, was born around 1918 in Isle of Wight County, Virginia. Brown describes his parents' personalities. They married young and Julia gave birth to their first child at sixteen. They raised a total of seven children and migrated north to New Jersey. The couple experienced difficulty, however, finding accommodations because of their large family. Brown never knew either of his grandmothers—his maternal grandmother died when he was very young and his paternal grandmother died before his birth. His maternal aunts were

cofounders of the St. Matthew's A.M.E. Church in Orange, New Jersey. Brown's maternal grandfather was a small farmer and his paternal grandfather, Roger Brown, was a landowner in Courtland, Virginia. He had not been able to maintain the land, however, after his children migrated from the South. The land was reverted by escheat.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:58 ?

Tyrone Brown migrated with his family from Virginia to Orange Valley, New Jersey near 1945. The family first moved in with a maternal cousin named Elmer. Later, the Browns' would also take in family members migrating north, including his paternal grandfather, Roger Brown. Brown was raised primarily in the Roseville neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey. He describes Roseville as poor and bordering an Italian and Jewish community. Brown describes his early childhood memories in Virginia and Orange Valley, New Jersey including Halloween parades, playing with the police department athletic league, and working as an order carrier for The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, as well as in maintenance for a local doctor. Brown's father, Madison Brown, worked in construction. Brown describes the sights, sounds and smells of his childhood including the rare occasion he saw his father lose his patience. Brown attended Roseville Avenue Elementary School in Newark, New Jersey and skipped multiple grades.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:25 ?

Tyrone Brown excelled as an elementary school student at Roseville Avenue School in Newark, New Jersey and skipped multiple grades. Brown describes his childhood personality as precocious and cocky—qualities that often got him involved in fights. He attended Vernon L. Davey Junior High School in East Orange, New Jersey and Sussex Avenue School in Newark, New Jersey. The Brown family relocated to Virginia where Brown attended Crestwood High School in Chesapeake. They returned to New Jersey after one year and Brown enrolled at East Orange Campus High School in East Orange, New Jersey, the same high school attended by HistoryMaker Dionne Warwick. Brown remembers his favorite teachers including a high school math instructor named Gilbert Adams. Under Adams' mentorship, Brown was encouraged to apply to Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. Hamilton initially denied Brown admission until Adams challenged the administration's decision and Brown was admitted.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_004, TRT: 4:32:09 ?

Tyrone Brown graduated from East Orange High School in East Orange, New Jersey in 1960. Brown, an active, was elected as the first black president of the student council. He describes race relations at East Orange High School—black and white students got along but had separate social lives. Brown was one of only two black students in advanced level courses. He attended Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, the alma mater of Robert Parris Moses, and continued to be an active student. He was inducted as a member of the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity and worked as a dorm advisor, among other things. In Brown's junior year of college in 1962, his brother, Arthur, committed suicide. Arthur had been born with severe cardiovascular issues and underwent open heart surgery as a child. The Brown children received good medical care because Brown's mother, Julia Goodman Brown, worked nights as a nurse's aide in Presbyterian Hospital in Newark, New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:00 ?

Tyrone Brown earned his B.A. degree in religion and philosophy in 1964 from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. While initially he had intended to

become a minister. Brown had grown uncertain, however, by his senior year and took the L.S.A.T.s and scored well. He had studied with a professor that knew the assistant dean at Cornell Law School. Brown earned a scholarship to Cornell and decided against becoming a litigator after losing sorely in a mock trial. A professor sent a letter of introduction on behalf of Brown to Chief Justice Earl Warren. Brown interviewed to clerk with Warren in 1967, and worked as his clerk from 1967 to 1968. Brown earned his J.D. degree in 1967 and although he had not known any African American lawyers, he describes how his mother admired both Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice Thurgood Marshall. Brown describes returning to Hamilton College in 1981 and being asked to join its board of directors in 1983.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:04 ?

Tyrone Brown clerked for Chief Justice Earl Warren for one year, from 1967 to 1968. He worked on a number of cases during this time, including *Brooks v. Florida* in 1967. One involved a prison riot at Raiford State Prison in Florida. While the riot was quelled, and a group of prisoners allegedly involved were tortured, interrogated and had their sentences extended. While clerking for Chief Justice Warren, Brown arranged for his mother to meet Justice Warren, who had been a hero of hers. Brown remembers meeting former President Lyndon B. Johnson and describes Senator Robert Kennedy's funeral procession and the aftermath of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968, in Washington D.C. Brown joined Covington and Burling LLP, law firm as an associate lawyer in 1968. He left the firm in 1971, to work on then-Senator Edmund Muskie's campaign for president.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:51 ?

Tyrone Brown left the Covington & Burling LLP in 1971 to work for then-Senator Edmund Muskie as staff director of the Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, as well as on his presidential campaign. Muskie lost in the primary, and Brown joined Post-Newsweek Stations, owned by the Washington Post, as its vice president of legal affairs. During Brown's tenure, the Post broke the Watergate Scandal and revealed the identity of the shooter who had made an assassination attempt on then-Governor George Wallace in 1972. The Post had been the only media outlet with camera footage of the shooter. Brown worked with and befriended news anchor Max Robinson also at Post-Newsweek Stations. Around this same time, Brown served as an investigating lawyer on the President's Commission on Campus Unrest and a legal observer to the 1969 and 1970 anti-war protests at the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_008, TRT: 8:30:05 ?

Tyrone Brown was appointed to the President's Commission on Campus Unrest in 1970. He traveled to Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi to interview women that were wounded during the May 15, 1970 campus shootings and helped to write the Commission's report. Brown joined the Caplin & Drysdale law firm as a tax lawyer in 1974. He describes working on a pro bono case for the American Civil Liberties Union against the City of Washington, D.C. for police misconduct where strip searches were conducted for simple traffic violations. Brown traveled to South Africa with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under the Law, where he met South African activist Stephen Biko. Brown talks about his participation in a forum about Chief Justice Earl Warren's service. Brown delivered "Clerking for the Chief Justice" at the conference and remembers meeting Warren Buffet as Vice President of Legal Affairs for Post-Newsweek Stations.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_009, TRT: 9:28:32 ?

Tyrone Brown was appointed to the Federal Communications Commission as a commissioner in 1977 by President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter. Brown considered the position a natural fit because of his prior experience in legal affairs with Post-Newsweek Stations. At the Federal Communications Commission, Brown worked with HistoryMaker Frank Washington to develop the Tax Certificate Program for the facilitation of minority ownership in broadcast cable and radio. The program offered tax incentives for selling media stations to minorities. Brown visited South Africa with the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under the Law and describes meeting with anti-apartheid activist, Steve Biko. Brown describes his experience in South Africa as an African American: he was permitted to travel where black South Africans were not allowed; was frequently subject to white South Africans sharing their perspective on apartheid; and stayed in a white family’s home. He also talks briefly about the presidency of Gerald Ford.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_010, TRT: 10:27:43 ?

Tyrone Brown worked at the Federal Communications Commission during a pivotal period when cable television began to compete with broadcast television. Brown talks about the significance of media mogul Ted Turner in cable, and remembers an evening that Turner took his son to a basketball game. Brown met Robert “Bob” Johnson—founder of Black Entertainment Television—and HistoryMaker Herbert P. Wilkins, Sr. in the late 1970s. Johnson had been president of the National Cable Broadcasting Association and Wilkins had been a media investor. In 1984, the three collaboratively won the cable contract for Washington, D.C. that would become District Cablevision. An antitrust lawsuit, however, was filed against them shortly after their win. Brown had an idea to rent cable lines from the telephone company in order to afford the building of a cable system in Washington, D.C. Additionally, Brown, Johnson, and Wilkins worked to convince the cable industry to invest in urban areas.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_011, TRT: 11:29:00 ?

Tyrone Brown left the Federal Communications Commission in 1981 after Ronald Reagan was elected president. He joined the Steptoe & Johnson LLP in their communications division and was eventually made partner. Brown had formerly developed a relationship with Robert “Bob” Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), and Brown helped oversee BET’s initial public offering in 1991. Brown explains how Johnson was able to maintain majority ownership after BET had gone public. Following the IPO and a business disagreement, Brown was no longer representing Johnson and took a year-long sabbatical from law. He joined the Wiley Rein, LLP as counsel and practiced communications law. Brown was involved in rescuing IRIDIUM, a large mobile satellite company, from bankruptcy. Brown, HistoryMaker Herbert P. Wilkins, Sr. and others operated it for six years and sold it in 2009. Brown also talks about Thurgood Marshall, the sale of BET to Viacom, and his relationship with Chief Judge David L. Bazelon.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_012, TRT: 12:28:35 ?

Tyrone Brown talks about the use of IRIDIUM phones. The phones use satellite technology and therefore service is made available anywhere. Brown talks about his two adult sons and being active in a parent caucus at their elementary school. In 2009, Brown became involved with the Media Access Project, a non-profit organization that advocates for the public interest. From 2006 to 2008, he taught a journalistic ethics course at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Brown talks about renovating a home in Miami Beach, Florida; describes how

he met his wife and; and explains the IRIDIUM business model.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_013, TRT: 13:28:23 ?

Tyrone Brown talks about his parents in their old age and the annual community basketball game hosted by black professionals in Shepherd Park, Washington D.C. Brown reflects on his legacy and accomplishments—he set a record in the triple jump as a student at Hamilton College. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. At the time of the interview, Brown had been developing a new cable network aimed at African Americans called the Black Heritage Network.

Video Oral History Interview with Tyrone Brown, Section A2012\_062\_001\_014, TRT: 14:16:43 ?

Tyrone Brown describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.