

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with J. Terry Edmonds

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Edmonds, J. Terry, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds,
Dates:	October 26, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:29:52).
Abstract:	Speechwriter and presidential appointee J. Terry Edmonds (1949 -) was the first African American speechwriter for a United States President. Edmonds was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 26, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_266
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Speechwriter Terry Edmonds was born on September 9, 1949 in Baltimore, Maryland. The son of Naomi Parker, a waitress, Edmonds grew up in the projects of Baltimore's inner-city. He spent time in a foster home and his family was on welfare for a number of years, but Edmonds went on to be the first in his family to attend college. He graduated from Morgan State University in 1973, with his B.A. degree in English.

In 1978, Edmonds was hired as a public relations and communications specialist at the Maryland Transit Administration. Then, in 1982, he took a position as director of public relations for Trahan, Burden and Charles Advertising. While working at Trahan, Burden and Charles, Edmonds also served as director of communications at the Joint Center for Political Studies, a Washington, D.C. think tank, from 1985 until 1987. In 1987, he was hired as a press secretary in the office of Kweisi Mfume, at that time a newly elected United States representative from Maryland. Edmonds worked in public relations for Macro Systems in 1988, Blue Cross and Blue Shield in 1989, the University Research Corporation in 1990, and R.O.W. Sciences in 1991. Then, in 1993, he was hired as a senior speechwriter for the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala. After serving under Shalala for two years, Edmonds worked as a speechwriter for President Bill Clinton in 1995, making him the first African American speechwriter for a United States President. In 1997, Edmonds was promoted to deputy director of speechwriting, and, in 1999, he was appointed by President Clinton as the director of speechwriting and assistant to the president.

In 2002, Edmonds was hired as the director of editorial management at AARP, and, in 2005, he served as the executive speechwriter for Time Warner, Inc. Edmonds then went on to work as a speechwriter for the Corporation for National and Community Service, as well as the senior advisor and speechwriter for NASA Administrator Charles Bolden. He was also appointed associate vice president and editorial director of Columbia University.

Terry Edmonds was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 26, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with J. Terry Edmonds was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 26, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Speechwriter and presidential appointee J. Terry Edmonds (1949 -) was the first African American speechwriter for a United States President.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Edmonds, J. Terry, 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Edmonds, J. Terry, 1949- --Interviews

Speechwriters--Interviews.

African American public relations personnel--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Presidential Appointee

Speechwriter

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 J. Terry Edmonds, October 26, 2013. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_001, TRT: 1:13:38
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J. Terry Edmonds narrates his photographs
Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_002, TRT: 2:28:53
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J. Terry Edmonds describes his family background. His mother, Naomi Marie Rogers, was born on May 22, 1925 in Bunn, North Carolina into a large family of tobacco farmers. Naomi Rogers moved to Baltimore around 1940 to escape rural life, and married Edmonds' father, John Edmonds, who had been in the U.S. Army. Edmonds' parents separated when he was young, and he was raised by his stepfather, Roland Parker, along with his brothers, Albert and Harold Edmonds, and his half-sister, Bernadette Guthrie. Edmonds recalls growing up poor in Baltimore; his interests in reading, baseball, and Motown; and watching news coverage of the Kennedy Assassination, the March on Washington, and the moon landing. He also reflects on the impact of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech on his own speechwriting career.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.

Childhood and youth--Activities--Maryland--Baltimore.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963--Assassination.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., 1963.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968. I have a dream.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_003, TRT: 3:28:01
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J. Terry Edmonds describes his interests and experiences from childhood and at Morgan State University. Edmonds remembers having exceptional teachers, falling in love with poetry writing, reading the Baltimore Afro-American, Jet and Ebony, and managing his high school baseball team. Edmonds enrolled in Morgan State University in 1967, where he began publishing his poetry in the Morgan Anthology and became involved in the Baltimore poetry scene, which included Lucille Clifton, Haki Madhubuti, Amiri Baraka, and Nikki Giovanni. Edmonds discusses the influence of growing up while Baltimore had a thriving culture thanks to Pennsylvania Avenue and the Royal Theatre. After graduating, Edmonds sought work as a journalist in Baltimore before deciding on a career in public relations.

Childhood and youth--Maryland--Baltimore.

Morgan State University.

Baseball.

Poetry.

African American press.

African American journalists--Maryland--Baltimore.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_004, TRT: 4:28:24
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J. Terry Edmonds discusses his experience at Morgan State University and his career leading up to working for the Clinton Administration. He remembers two professors who encouraged him, Dr. Ruthe Sheffey and Dr. Waters Turpin, and describes the influence of Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes on his poetry. After graduating with his B.A. degree in English in 1973, Edmonds worked in public relations at a series of organizations including the United Way of Central Maryland; Carling-National Breweries; the Maryland Mass Transit Authority;

and the ad agency Trahan, Burden & Charles. In 1985, he moved to Washington D.C. and became Director of Communications at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies under Eddie Williams. In 1987, Edmonds began writing speeches when he served as press secretary for U.S. Congressman Kweisi Mfume. He worked in public relations at a series of organizations in Washington before becoming senior speechwriter for U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala in 1993.

Morgan State University.

Public relations and politics--United States.

Shalala, Donna E.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (U.S.).

Mfume, Kweisi.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_005, TRT: 5:28:53
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J. Terry Edmonds describes his experience as a speechwriter for President Bill Clinton. In 1995, Edmonds left his job as Deputy Director of Speechwriting for Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala to become the first African American speechwriter for a U.S. President. Edmonds remembers writing speeches for President Clinton on occasions such as the Elian Gonzalez affair, the Oklahoma City bombing, the 35th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, the Million Man March, the Morgan State University Commencement in 1997, and the death of Barbara Jordan. Edmonds recalls President Clinton's affinity for African American culture and his diverse White House staff, which included Betty Currie, Bob Nash, and Rodney Slater. During Clinton's last week in office in 2001, Edmonds wrote and submitted President Clinton's statement on the unfinished business of race.

Clinton, Bill, 1946-

Oklahoma City Federal Building Bombing, Oklahoma City, Okla., 1995.

Million Man March (1995 : Washington, D.C.).

Morgan State University.

Jordan, Barbara, 1936-1996.

United States--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Terry Edmonds, Section A2013_266_001_006, TRT: 6:22:03
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J. Terry Edmonds discusses his career at the end of the Clinton Administration and afterwards. In 1997, Edmonds was promoted to Deputy Director of Speechwriting and in 1999, he was promoted to Director of Speechwriting. The highlight of his experience as chief speechwriter was managing the 2000 State of the Union address. Edmonds reflects on the impact that working in the Clinton Administration has had on his career. After Clinton left office, Edmonds served as Director of Editorial Management for AARP and worked on the John Kerry campaign. He also wrote speeches for prominent African American leaders such as Richard Parsons, President Obama, and Charles Bolden. He reflects on the importance of inner strength, his legacy as the first African American speechwriter for a U.S. President, his civil rights work, his family, and his plans for the future.

Clinton, Bill, 1946-

Parsons, Richard D., 1948-

Kerry, John, 1943---Presidential campaigns.

AARP Foundation
Obama, Barack