

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas W. Cole

PERSON

Cole, Thomas W. Jr., 1941-

**Alternative Names:** Thomas W. Cole;

**Life Dates:** January 11, 1941-April 14, 2022

**Place of Birth:** Vernon, Texas, USA

**Residence:** Atlanta, GA

**Work:** Atlanta, GA

**Occupations:** Chemistry Professor; University President

## Biographical Note

Thomas Winston Cole, Jr. was born the second of four children to Eva and Thomas W. Cole, Sr. on January 11, 1941, in Vernon, Texas. The Cole family moved to Marshall, Texas, where his father was appointed President of Wiley College from 1958 to 1971. During his childhood, Cole attended public school and was an active Eagle Scout.

Cole graduated from high school in 1958 and attended Wiley College where he was active in the Kappa Chi and Alpha Kappa Mu Honor societies. Graduating summa cum laude from Wiley College in 1961, Cole received his B.S. degree and the Southern Regional Fellowship. Cole attended the University of Chicago and earned his Ph.D. in organic chemistry in 1966; it was here that he studied with P.E. Eaton and they became the first chemists to synthesize the Cubane Carbon Skeleton System.

Cole began his professional career in 1966 as an assistant professor at the Atlanta University Center, in Atlanta, Georgia. During his tenure, Cole would serve as chairman of the department of chemistry between 1970 and 1979; the Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Chemistry between 1969 and 1979; Chair of the Atlanta University Center chemistry department; and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs between 1979 and 1982. Cole also worked as a research scientist for Procter & Gamble and the Celanese Fiber Company. From 1982 to 1986, Cole was president of West Virginia State College. Following his presidency, Cole was appointed Chancellor of the West Virginia Board of Regents, one of four African Americans to head a state system of public higher education.

Cole returned to Atlanta to accept a position as president of Clark College in 1988, and

led the oversight and planning for the consolidation of Clark College and Atlanta University. Cole served simultaneously as president of both institutions during the 1988-1989 academic years until his appointment as President of Clark Atlanta University in 1989. Cole continued to serve as president until 2002.

After retirement, Cole lived in Atlanta, Georgia, with his wife, Brenda.

Thomas Cole was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on December 15, 2006.

Cole passed away on April 14, 2022, at the age of 81.

## Related Entries

**University of Chicago** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**H.B. Pemberton High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Wiley College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Atlanta University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to 1978]

**Professor**

**West Virginia State College** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**President**

**West Virginia Board of Regents** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Chancellor**

**Atlanta University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1978 to 1981]

**Provost**

**Clark Atlanta University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1987 to 2002]

**President**

**Project Kaleidoscope** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Great Schools Atlanta** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity** [MEMBEROF]

[from 1960 to ?]