

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas N. Todd

PERSON

Todd, Thomas N., 1938-

**Alternative Names:** Thomas N. Todd;

**Life Dates:** September 24, 1938-

**Place of Birth:** Demopolis, Alabama, USA

**Residence:** Chicago, IL

**Occupations:** Civil Rights Lawyer

## Biographical Note

Activist attorney widely known as "TNT" for his oratorical skills, Thomas N. Todd was born on September 24, 1938, in Demopolis, Alabama. His father died shortly thereafter, so his mother, and eventually a stepfather, raised Thomas in Mobile, Alabama. The family was poor, but Thomas, a large youth with a rich voice, nevertheless became a leader in school activities. He graduated early from Central High School in Mobile in 1955 and started that same year at Southern University at Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Although he considered dropping out of college after his mother died in 1958, he remained enrolled and received a B.A. degree in political science in 1959. Todd continued through Southern University's School of Law graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1963. Todd served as a lawyer in the United States Army from 1964 to 1967 and joined the staff of the United States Attorney's Office in Chicago in 1967. In this capacity, Todd made history when he developed the first criminal case against a Chicago policeman for deprivation of an individuals' civil rights in 1968. Todd organized and established the first Civil Rights Office in a local United States Attorney's Office in the United States in 1969. The United States v. Gorman, the first federal criminal case against a Chicago police officer ended in a hung jury in 1971.

Todd was the first full time black law professor at Northwestern University where he taught from 1970 to 1974. Todd has been admitted to practice law before many courts including the Louisiana Supreme Court, the United States Court of Military Appeals, the Illinois Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court.

A powerful spokesman for civil rights, Todd was president of the Chicago chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1971 and president of Operation PUSH from 1983 -1984. During the Harold Washington mayoral campaigns of 1983

and 1987, Todd's oratory was often used to "warm up" the crowd prior to Washington's arrival. Semi-retired and the recipient of over 500 awards and honorary degrees, Todd is one of the most electrifying commencement speakers on black college campuses. He and his wife, Janis, and two daughters live in Chicago.

## Related Entries

**Central High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**United States Army** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 200307 to 200510]

**Lawyer**

**Northwestern University Law School** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to 1974]

**Professor**