

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas N. Todd

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Todd, Thomas N., 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd,
Dates:	June 6, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:05).
Abstract:	Civil rights lawyer Thomas N. Todd (1938 -) established the first Civil Rights Office in a United States Attorney's office and was the first full time black law professor at Northwestern University, where he taught from 1970 to 1974. Todd was 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. Todd was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Thomas N. Todd was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Thomas N. Todd (1938 -) established the first Civil Rights Office in a United States Attorney's office and was the first full time black law professor at Northwestern University, where he taught from 1970 to 1974. Todd was 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.

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:

Todd, Thomas N., 1938-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Todd, Thomas N., 1938---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Thomas N. Todd, June 6, 2002. 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 Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_001, TRT: 0:30:14 ?

Thomas N. Todd recalls his childhood and youth, from his early memories of the plantation where his mother's family worked as sharecroppers, to his years at a Historically Black Law School. He remembers vividly his experiences in segregated elementary and high schools, particularly the educators who most influenced him. Todd briefly discusses his interest in music and public speaking. He concludes by relating his experiences, during his undergraduate years, in ROTC.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Thomas N. Todd begins the interview by remembering his mother's death, and the role it played in his expulsion from the ROTC. He then describes his cathartic year after college, and how it led to his decision to apply to law school. Todd recalls his attendance and successful completion of law school, despite the state of Alabama's refusal to honor a promised scholarship. He also discusses his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement during this time. Todd concludes the interview by detailing the employment discrimination he encountered in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_003, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Thomas N. Todd provides a detailed description of his early career, starting out as a JAG officer at Fort Sheridan, prosecuting racial discrimination in the Army. He continues to struggle for civil rights as the first head of the Civil Rights Division of the Chicago U.S. Attorney's Office during some of the most explosive events of the late 1960's, including the murder of two Black Panthers in Chicago in 1969, and the brutal beatings by police during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968. Todd also describes his difficulties as the only black faculty member of the Northwestern University law school, and his leadership in Operation Breadbasket and the SCLC. He concludes by briefly outlining the rift between Jesse Jackson and the SCLC, which led to the founding of Operation PUSH.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Thomas N. Todd begins the interview by describing the founding of Operation PUSH with Jesse Jackson. He expounds on some of the issues central to PUSH, including economic development and education. Todd then moves on to politics, focusing on the movement in the black community to elect Ralph Metcalfe and Harold Washington. He briefly discusses some of the hurdles the black community overcame in order to vote, from lynchings to firehoses. Todd concludes by describing his speaking style, how it developed, and how he has used it to benefit election campaigns.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_005, TRT: 0:31:01 ?

Thomas N. Todd talks about his career; he begins by listing his most important civil rights cases and his speaking engagements. He also illustrates extensively the need for educational opportunities for today's youth. Todd also discusses being in the public eye--why he won't run for public office, and what he hopes his legacy will be. He continues by disclosing some of the major points of his public speaking engagements. Todd concludes by speculating on what his parents would think of his career.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section A2002_094_001_006, TRT: 0:23:00 ?

Thomas N. Todd describes his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas N. Todd, Section
A2002_094_TODD_THOMAS_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:28:00

This tape contains a speech by Thomas N. Todd to the National Education

Association Retirees at the NEA Retired annual meeting in 2000. During his speech, Todd focuses on the importance of education and what changes need to be made within society to ensure children get the most out of their education. He highlights the issues that are impacting the value of education including the legislature, shifts in politics and reduced funding in education.