

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Solomon Brown Watson, IV

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Watson, Solomon Brown, 1944-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 27, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:07:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Corporate general counsel Solomon Brown Watson, IV (1944 - ) led the legal department of the New York Times. Watson is a Vietnam War veteran who has championed the cause of veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Watson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 27, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_245
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Senior vice president and corporate general counsel to *The New York Times*, Solomon B. Watson IV was born on April 14, 1944, in Salem, New Jersey. In 1966, Watson graduated from Howard University with his B.A. degree in English. During the Vietnam War, Watson joined the U.S. Army. He served as a lieutenant in the military police corps from 1966 to 1968 and was awarded the Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medals. In 1968, while still in Vietnam, Watson took the LSAT and was accepted into Harvard Law School. Upon being discharged from the army in 1968, he entered Harvard Law School and graduated in 1971

with his J.D. degree.

After graduation, Watson worked as an associate in the Boston law firm of Bingham, Dana & Gould where he was one of their first minority lawyers. In 1974, he joined the legal department of The Times Company and became the assistant secretary of the company in December 1976, and secretary in July 1979. He was named assistant general counsel in 1984, general counsel in 1989, and senior vice president in 1996. With a twelve-lawyer staff, he supervises the paper's litigation, copyright, and intellectual property issues and oversees acquisitions.

Watson has championed the cause of Vietnam War veterans exposed to Agent Orange. He was a member of the advisory board of the Agent Orange Settlement Fund, which was established to distribute funds to about ten million affected people. It was the largest class action settlement at its time. Watson was a participant in President Clinton's Call to Action to the Legal Profession for Racial Equality and Pro Bono Services.

Watson served as chair of the Dinner Committee of the American Jewish Committee's 1998 Judge Learned Hand Award Dinner and that same year he received the Pioneer of the Profession Award from the Minority Corporate Counsel Association. In 1999, he received the Distinguished Service Award from the Greater New York Chapter of ACCA. He is a member of One Hundred Black Men, Inc. and the Anglers' Club of New York. In 2002, Watson was awarded the National Equal Justice Award by the NAACP League Defense and Educational Fund in honor of his professional accomplishments, commitment to public service and legal excellence. Watson is an avid saltwater fly fisherman.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV was conducted by Shawn Wilson on October 27, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate general counsel Solomon Brown Watson, IV (1944 - ) led the legal department of the New York Times. Watson is a Vietnam War veteran who has championed the cause of veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

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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:

Watson, Solomon Brown, 1944-

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghilea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Watson, Solomon Brown, 1944---Interviews

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African American lawyers--New York (State)--New York--Interviews

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African American veterans--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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New York Times Company

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## **Occupations:**

Corporate General Counsel

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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 Solomon Brown Watson, IV, October 27, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:49 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson IV was born on April 14, 1944 in Woodstown, New Jersey to Denise Jones Watson and S. Brown Watson, III. A native of Woodstown, his mother attended school through the eleventh grade and later worked at Anchor Hocking Company. Watson and his siblings were raised by his maternal great grandmother, Frances Jackson, the minister of Spencer Union American Methodist Episcopal Church. Her household consisted of her husband, James Jackson, and Watson's grandmother, Myrtle Jones. They lived in a house without running water on Railroad Avenue in Woodstown's Bailey Town section. Watson's father worked at Mannington Mills, Inc. in Salem, New Jersey until being laid off in the mid-1950s. He joined his brother in Detroit, Michigan, where he found work but failed to send for the family. Watson's paternal grandfather worked as a florist, and his Aunt Mildred, was a teacher. While the local high school was not segregated, Watson was the first of his family to attend an integrated elementary school.

African American lawyers--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

## African American veterans--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:15 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV grew up in Woodstown, New Jersey, where the black churches were stratified based on class and skin color. He began elementary school soon after integration, and was taught by mostly white teachers. Despite the de facto segregation of Woodstown High School, Watson played sports, and was known as an intelligent student. Encouraged by his English teacher, Watson wrote a sports column in the school newspaper. Upon graduating, Watson obtained a loan to study English at Howard University. He struggled to balance his social life and schoolwork as both a Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadet and an honors program student. He worked briefly at Washington City Tribune, and published a poem in The Denver Post. While he participated in rallies on campus, Watson was not fully engaged in the university's Civil Rights Movement led by Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. He remembers experiencing color discrimination at Howard University, and President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:14 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV graduated from Howard University in 1965. He fulfilled his advanced Reserve Officers' Training Corps obligation by attending military police school at Fort Gordon, Georgia. He worked as an adjutant in New York until receiving orders to go to Vietnam in 1966. While stationed at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base, he was asked to escort his fellow military officer to jail after a drug violation. While the troops segregated themselves by race for the most part, Watson befriended Jewish soldier Steven Schwartz, who was also a lawyer. With Schwartz's encouragement, Watson applied to law school, and was admitted to Harvard Law School and Howard University School of Law. He opted to attend Harvard Law School, feeling it would provide a greater challenge and a new environment. Watson suffered mental trauma from his military service, but eventually overcame these issues. Although he initially dismissed Reverend Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s critique of Vietnam, Watson later reconsidered his stance.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:04 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV learned of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination just before taking his LSAT exam in Saigon, Vietnam. In 1969, he returned to the United States to attend Harvard Law School. After his first year, Watson secured a position at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Around this time, Watson was informed of his brother's death in Vietnam. He graduated in 1971, and joined the law firm of Bingham, Dana and Gould in Boston, Massachusetts, where he remained for three years. He then joined the legal team at The New York Times Company. After making a successful presentation to the board of directors, Watson was promoted to corporate secretary, and later rose to become the assistant general counsel. Watson remembers discrimination suits against The New York Times, and describes the First Amendment cases involving reporters Myron Farber and Judith Miller. He also talks about journalist Jayson Blair's plagiarism scandal and managing editor Gerald M. Boyd's subsequent resignation.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:24 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV attended the Tuck School of Business executive graduate training program in 1984. He was promoted to general counsel of The New York Times Company in 1989, and worked on the acquisition of The Boston Globe in 1993. When Catherine Henn, the Globe's general counsel, retired, Watson assumed her duties as well. During his time at The New York Times, Watson handled legal cases as well as strategy. In 2001, Watson's department litigated the U.S. Supreme Court case *New York Times Co. v. Tasini*, which challenged the legality of publishing freelance work online. He felt that they lost the case due to judicial bias. Watson talks about the diversity initiatives at the newspaper under chairman Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, Jr. and chief executive officer Janet Robinson. He also talks about the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court; his career at The New

York Times Company; and the Agent Orange Class Assistance Project, where he helped Vietnam veterans receive settlement funds.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:17 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV was mentored at The New York Times by the head of personnel, Guy Garrett, Jr., and attorneys Michael E. Ryan and James C. Goodale. He went on to mentor younger employees, and befriended other minority general counsels, including Paula Boggs, Gloria Santana, Deirdre Stanley and Kenneth C. Frazier. Watson reflects upon the role of affirmative action in his own career and how it affected hiring at The New York Times. After graduating from Howard University, Watson married Bernadette Aldridge, a native of New York. They had two daughters together but divorced soon after Watson's return from Vietnam. Watson describes his daughters, lawyer Kira Watson and teacher Katitti Watson. He later married Brenda J. Watson, who worked in human resources at The New York Times Company. He reflects upon how he would like to be remembered, his many accolades, his career and his legacy. He describes his membership in 100 Black Men, Inc. and the Boule, as well as his hobby of fly fishing.

Video Oral History Interview with Solomon Brown Watson, IV, Section A2005\_245\_001\_007, TRT: 0:08:10 2005/10/27

Solomon Brown Watson, IV narrates his photographs.