

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Theodore V. Wells, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wells, Theodore, 1950-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr.,
Dates:	July 25, 2007, June 7, 2007 and May 15, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	15 Betacame SP videocassettes (7:24:34).
Abstract:	Litigator Theodore V. Wells, Jr. (1950 -) was partner and litigation department co-chair at the law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison. Wells was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 25, 2007, June 7, 2007 and May 15, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_175
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney Theodore V. Wells, Jr. has made a mark on the legal world as one of the most sought-after white collar criminal lawyers. Ted Wells was born Theodore Von Wells, Jr. on April 28, 1950 in Washington, D.C. to Phyllis and Theodore V. Wells, Sr., and grew up in a small rowhouse in Northwest, Washington, D.C. Wells was raised by his mother, who worked in the U.S. Navy's mailroom. Wells became known for his academic focus, and by the time he attended Calvin Coolidge High School was known for his grades as well as his prowess on the football field.

In 1968, Wells graduated from Calvin Coolidge High School and attended the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. While attending Holy Cross, Wells was mentored by Reverend John E. Brooks and Edward Bennett Williams and became head of the black student union. One classmate, also a member of the union, was current U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, with whom Wells participated in a walkout because of the school's racially motivated unfair practices. In 1971, Wells married his high school girlfriend, Nina Mitchell, in Washington, D.C. The following year, he returned to school and received his B.A. degree.

After graduation, Wells attended Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School simultaneously, receiving both his J.D. and M.B.A. degrees in 1976. Wells was one of only forty-three black students then enrolled in Harvard Law School. He then worked as a law clerk for Judge John J. Gibbons, a Third Circuit judge, where he worked alongside another current Supreme Court Justice, Samuel Alito. The following year, after a very brief clerkship at Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker in Los Angeles, Wells joined the Lowenstein Sandler law firm in New Jersey and worked doing pro bono criminal defense work under mentor Matthew Boylan. There, he would hone his trial room technique.

In 1982, Wells became partner at Lowenstein Sandler. The following year, he won his case for Hudson County Prosecutor Harold Ruvoldt, then on trial for bribery and extortion and in 1987 successfully defended Raymond Donovan, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, his first high profile case. In 1993, Wells was elected Fellow for the American College of Trial Lawyers, and, in 1994, he was chosen as one of the most influential lawyers in America by the *National Law Journal*, a title he earned again in 1997 and 2000.

In 1998, Wells won a case for U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Michael Espy in *U.S. v. Espy*, and the following year, Wells effectively defended Franklin L. Haney, a Tennessee financier who had become involved in a campaign finance controversy for the 1996 presidential elections. In 2000, Wells became Bill Bradley's National Campaign Treasurer during his unsuccessful presidential run. That year, he also joined Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, becoming partner and litigation department co-chair. Since then, Wells has defended a number of major corporations in a variety of cases, and his clients have included Johnson & Johnson, Mitsubishi Corporation, Philip Morris, ExxonMobil and the Carnival Corporation, as well as the first RICO case on Wall Street. Most recently, Wells defended Dick Cheney's former chief of staff "Scooter" Libby in the Valerie Plame CIA leak scandal.

Wells was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 15, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 25, 2007, June 7, 2007 and May 15, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 15 Betacame SP videocassettes. Litigator Theodore V. Wells, Jr. (1950 -) was partner and litigation department co-chair at the law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison.

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:

Wells, Theodore, 1950-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wells, Theodore, 1950---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison

Occupations:

Litigator

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 Theodore V. Wells, Jr., July 25, 2007, June 7, 2007 and May 15, 2007. 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).

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 Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_001_001, TRT: 0:29:29 2007/05/15

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was born on April 28, 1950 in Washington, D.C. to Phyllis Wells and Theodore V. Wells, Sr. Wells' father served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, and later worked in the copy room of the U.S. Navy Department in Washington, D.C. Wells' mother was adopted and raised on a farm near Leesburg, Virginia, where her adoptive mother worked as a cook for radio personality Arthur Godfrey. At eighteen years old, Wells' mother moved to Washington, D.C. and secured a position in the mailroom at the U.S. Navy Department, where she met Wells' father. Wells' mother raised him in the Northwest neighborhood of Washington, D.C., where his

family was among the first black households. For several years, they faced harassment from their white neighbors, who regularly placed for sale signs in their front yard. Eventually, the neighborhood became predominantly African American. As a child, Wells enjoyed playing bid whist and reading comic books and novels, including the works of Sinclair Lewis.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_001_002, TRT: 0:30:55 2007/05/15

Theodore V. Wells, Jr.'s father, Theodore V. Wells, Sr., worked in the copy room at the U.S. Navy Department in Washington, D.C. There, he was once shot in the shoulder by a coworker's husband. He survived the shooting; and, although Wells' parents were divorced, he and his mother often visited during his father's recovery at St. Elizabeths Hospital. Wells grew up in segregated Washington, D.C., and rarely interacted with the white community during his childhood. He began his education at the all-black Rudolph Elementary School, and was later transferred to Keene Elementary School. Wells went on to attend Calvin Coolidge High School, where the students often debated the philosophies of Malcolm X and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and followed the activities of SNCC leaders Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown on the campus of Howard University. He also remembers serving as a driver for the Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_001_003, TRT: 0:31:14 2007/05/15

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was raised in the Northwest neighborhood of Washington, D.C., where he was influenced by future business executives A. Barry Rand and Kent B. Amos. They were six years older than Wells, and treated him as a younger brother. Wells also grew up alongside Henry H. Kennedy, Jr., who became a federal judge; and Kermit Washington, who went on to a professional basketball career. In Washington, D.C., Wells attended Calvin Coolidge High School, where he played on the football team under Coach Phil Gainous. He was offered full athletic scholarships to a number of colleges, and originally planned to matriculate at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. However, Wells

decided to attend the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he was one of nineteen African American students to integrate the all-white school. His classmates included athlete and attorney Eddie Jenkins, Jr., U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and politician Stanley E. Grayson.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/05/15

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was among the first group of students to integrate the all-white College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he enrolled on a football scholarship in the late 1960s. Wells immersed himself in the athletic program; but, after performing poorly on his examinations, decided to focus on his studies, and quit the football team after his first season. At the time, the campus of the College of the Holy Cross was politically tumultuous, as student organizations protested for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. During Wells' first year, he cofounded the Black Student Union with his African American peers, including future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. With Wells as the vice president, the group lobbied to increase African American enrollment and hire black faculty. While in college, Wells continued dating his high school sweetheart, Nina M. Wells, whom he married during his senior year.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_001_005, TRT: 0:30:24 2007/05/15

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. attended the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. He initially played on the football team, but quit after one season to focus on his academics. Wells majored in economics, and aspired to earn a Ph.D. degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after completing his undergraduate studies. In addition, he was active in the College of the Holy Cross' Black Student Union. As the vice president, Wells presented the organization's concerns about black enrollment and student housing to the dean of students, John E. Brooks; and secured an all-black section in the dormitories for his class, which included nineteen African American students. During the summers, Wells worked as an event programmer for the National Parks Service in

Washington, D.C. For one event, he organized a concert by The Temptations, who performed the protest song 'Ball of Confusion' at the White House for President Richard Nixon and First Lady Pat Nixon.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_006, TRT: 0:30:41 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was one of the founding members of the Black Student Union at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. The organization's membership also included Clarence Thomas, Arthur N. Martin, Jr. and Eddie Jenkins, Jr. In December of 1969, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) staged an anti-war protest on the campus of the College of the Holy Cross. The leaders of the SDS were charged with campus policy violations, as were five African American students who had no leadership role. Wells acted as their lawyer, and argued that it was unjust to penalize the five black students, when the sixty white students who participated faced no charges. Nevertheless, the college administration expelled the students; and, in protest, Wells and the rest of the African American students staged a walkout protest. Faced with national scrutiny, the administration retracted the sentences, and the black students returned for the spring semester.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_007, TRT: 0:30:21 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. married his high school sweetheart, Nina M. Wells, on Christmas Day of his senior year at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. Upon graduating, Wells moved to Somerville, Massachusetts, and enrolled in the joint J.D./M.B.A. degree program at Harvard University, while his wife matriculated at the Suffolk University Law School in Boston, Massachusetts. During the first year of his graduate studies, Wells took courses exclusively at the Harvard Business School; and, in his second year, he transitioned to the Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There, his classmates included Kenneth Chenault, who became the CEO of American Express; Franklin D. Raines, who served as chairman of the Federal National Mortgage Association; and Charles Ogletree,

who became a Harvard Law School professor. Wells studied under Morton Horwitz and Phillip E. Areeda, as well as Derrick A. Bell, Jr., who was one of the university's few African American professors at the time.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_008, TRT: 0:30:54 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. served as both writer and editor of the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review while enrolled at the Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the time, the school had only a few African American professors, including Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr.; Harry T. Edwards; and Wells' advisor, Derrick A. Bell, Jr. During the summers, Wells worked as an intern at several corporate law firms, including PricewaterhouseCoopers and Arnold and Porter Kaye Scholer LLP in Washington, D.C.; and Alston, Miller and Gaines in Atlanta, Georgia. Then, Wells obtained a clerkship under Judge John Joseph Gibbons of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Newark, New Jersey. There, Wells met attorney Raymond A. Brown, who inspired him to become a trial lawyer; and clerked alongside Samuel Alito, who became a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Wells also describes Gibbons' judicial perspective, which prioritized legal history.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_009, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. served as a judicial clerk under Judge John Joseph Gibbons of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Newark, New Jersey. In this capacity, Wells conducted research for case briefs, and wrote bench memos for twenty cases per month. In addition to Gibbons' influence, Wells was inspired by trial lawyer Raymond A. Brown; and, after watching Brown try a case, decided to pursue a career in trial law. During his final year at the Harvard Law School, Wells accepted a position with the law firm of Paul, Hastings, Janofsky and Walker LLP in Los Angeles, California. However, after only ten days in Los Angeles, he realized that he wanted to live on the East Coast, and returned to New Jersey. There, he accepted a position with Lowenstein, Sandler, Brochin, Kohl, Fisher and Boylan, where he worked

directly under attorney Matthew P. Boylan. Two months after arriving at the firm, Wells was assigned to work on a Soviet Union espionage case.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_010, TRT: 0:31:11 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. joined the law firm of Lowenstein, Sandler, Brochin, Kohl, Frisher and Boylan in Newark, New Jersey in 1978. He began as a brief writer under Matthew P. Boylan, who encouraged Wells to argue the motions he wrote for pretrial hearings. Wells' early casework included the defense of Al Dickens, who was the leader of the New World of Islam, a Nation of Islam sect that had been involved in a string of robberies and murders in Newark. During this time, Wells also conducted pro bono casework for indigent defendants, and became an adjunct professor at the Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark. After a few years, he was named a partner of the law firm of Lowenstein Sandler LLP. He successfully defended politicians at the state and federal level, including Hudson County Prosecutor Harold J. Ruvoldt, Jr. and U.S. Secretary of Labor Raymond J. Donovan. He also became involved with Donald M. Payne's campaigns for U.S. Congress.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_002_011, TRT: 0:30:55 2007/06/07

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. met former professional basketball player Bill Bradley just after Bradley's election to the U.S. Senate in 1978. Bradley invited Wells to join his congressional staff in Washington, D.C., but Wells turned down the offer in order to pursue his aspiration to become a trial lawyer. From that time, Wells continued his friendship with Bradley, and served as Bradley's national treasurer during his bid for the U.S. presidency. He also assisted with campaigns for politicians in New Jersey, like Donald M. Payne and William D. Payne; and contested the election of New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman. Wells spent the majority of his career as a trial lawyer at Lowenstein Sandler LLP in Newark, New Jersey, where he was named a partner in 1982. He remained there until 2000, when he left to join Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison LLP in New York

City. Wells also recalls turning down several federal judicial appointments during his career.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_003_012, TRT: 0:30:06 2007/07/25

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. was a member of the Democratic National Committee's finance committee during William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton's presidential campaign in 1992. Wells also served as the finance chairman to Democratic politicians like Congressman Donald M. Payne and Senator Bill Bradley. After President Clinton's election, Wells was offered an appointment as a federal judge. He considered transitioning to the judiciary, but decided to remain a trial lawyer and law partner at the firm of Lowenstein Sandler LLP. In this capacity, Wells represented the former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Espy, who was accused of accepting improper gifts from the Crop Growers Corporation insurance company. Wells obtained an acquittal for Espy in 1998, despite calling no witnesses to the stand to testify. Wells went on to defend investment bankers Calvin Grigsby and Michael Milken during their federal indictments in the late 1990s. He also describes his defense strategies for high profile clients.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_003_013, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/07/25

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. represented Reverend Dr. Floyd Flake's wife, Margaret Elaine Flake, in 1992, when she was charged with the misuse of federal money in the construction of the Greater Allen A.M.E. Church in Queens, New York. In the 2000s, Wells moved to the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison LLP in New York City, where his mentors, attorneys Arthur L. Liman and Edward Bennett Williams, had been partners. For his first case at the firm, Wells defended Niels Lauersen, a fertility doctor charged with insurance fraud in 2004. Lauersen had been accused of billing patients' insurance companies for minor surgeries when he was in fact performing in vitro fertilization; and, while preparing to argue the case, much of Wells' time was spent studying the techniques and procedures involved in fertility treatment. The first trial ended in a hung jury, and Wells

left the case after Lauersen made inappropriate comments to the press.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_003_014, TRT: 0:31:09 2007/07/25

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. defended the Merck and Co., Inc. pharmaceutical company from charges regarding the side effects of the pain relieving drug Vioxx. He also represented investment banker Frank Quattrone, who was charged with obstruction of justice in New York City in 2006. Although Quattrone was not acquitted, Wells persuaded the U.S. attorney's office to offer him a deferred prosecution. At this point in the interview, Wells explains the purpose of a deferred prosecution, in which the prosecutor agrees to grant amnesty if the defendant avoids further criminal activity. The decision of Quattrone's case was unusual, as deferred prosecutions were rarely awarded except to prevent large corporations from going out of business, as in the case of Arthur Andersen LLP v. United States in 2005. Then, in 2006, Wells represented Scooter Libby, a former official under President George Walker Bush, who was charged with perjury and obstruction of justice in relation to the federal investigation of the Iraq War.

Video Oral History Interview with Theodore V. Wells, Jr., Section A2007_175_003_015, TRT: 0:18:05 2007/07/25

Theodore V. Wells, Jr. served as the co-chair of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. He talks about the organization's need for funding; as, at the time of the interview, there were several cases pending at the U.S. Supreme Court that challenged the constitutionality of affirmative action. He also reflects upon his political beliefs, and the opportunities for African Americans in the U.S. government. Wells concludes the interview by describing his hopes for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered.