



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dennis Hightower

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hightower, Dennis
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower,
Dates:	January 31, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:06:01).
Abstract:	Broadcast executive and business professor Dennis Hightower (1941 -) is the former Deputy Secretary of Commerce and president of Walt Disney Television and Communications. As president, he oversaw Disney's acquisition of ABC, ABC Family, ESPN, A&E and Lifetime Networks. Upon his retirement in June 1996, Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program. Hightower was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_004
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive and business professor Dennis Fowler Hightower was born on October 28, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Marvin William Hightower, and Virginia Fowler Hightower, an educator. After graduating from McKinley High School in 1958, Hightower attended Howard University where he earned his B.S degree in 1962. In addition to joining Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and being a college athlete, Hightower was the top graduating cadet of the Army ROTC university program.

After graduating from Howard University in 1962, Hightower enlisted in the U.S. Army where he served as a platoon leader and company commander in the 101st Airborne Division. Afterwards, Hightower was trained as a counterintelligence officer and field operations intelligence officer, working in strategic and operational assignments in the United States and abroad. Hightower also served in Vietnam in the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, where he was promoted to the rank of major. Hightower was awarded two Bronze Star medals, a Purple Heart, three Air Medals, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, five Army Commendation Medals with distinction for valor, the Vietnam Honor Medal First Class, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

In 1970, Hightower was hired by Xerox as manager of organizational planning. He left his position there in 1972, when he was awarded a fellowship to attend Harvard Business School. He graduated in 1974 with his M.B.A. Hightower then joined McKinsey & Company and worked as a senior associate and engagement manager until 1978, when he was hired by General Electric's Lighting Business Group. In 1987, Hightower was hired by The Walt Disney Company as vice president of Consumer Products for Europe, based in Paris, France, and later

became president of Consumer Products for Europe, Middle East and Africa divisions. In 1995, he was promoted to president of Walt Disney Television and Telecommunications. Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School in June 1996, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program. On August 11, 2009, Hightower was appointed by President Barack Obama as deputy secretary of commerce. Hightower was charged with general management duties until his tenure ended on August 27, 2010.

His numerous awards include the U.S. Department of Commerce Pioneer Award; Harvard Business School Alumni Achievement Award and Bert King Service Award; and an honorary doctorate degree and Alumni Achievement Award for Business from Howard University. He is a board member of Accenture, Ltd., Brown Capital Management, Domino's Pizza, Inc. and Casey Family Programs, and a former trustee at Howard University.

Dennis Fowler Hightower was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 31, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dennis Hightower was conducted by Cheryl Butler on January 31, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Broadcast executive and business professor Dennis Hightower (1941 -) is the former Deputy Secretary of Commerce and president of Walt Disney Television and Communications. As president, he oversaw Disney's acquisition of ABC, ABC Family, ESPN, A&E and Lifetime Networks. Upon his retirement in June 1996, Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program.

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:

Hightower, Dennis F.

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hightower, Dennis F.--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Walt Disney Company--Interviews.

Harvard University--Faculty--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Walt Disney Company.

Harvard Business School.

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

BusinessMakers

EducationMakers

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 Dennis Hightower, January 31, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 11/15/2011 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, January 31, 2008

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_001, TRT: 0:28:27
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower reflects on his childhood experiences growing up on 74 S. Street N.W., in segregated Washington D.C. Hightower discusses his earliest memory of his neighborhood in which he lived among a variety of black professionals. Considering his neighborhood as an advantage to his education, Hightower talks about Mott Elementary school, Dunbar High school, and the vicinity of his neighborhood to Howard University where he graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. Hightower then discusses his mother's teaching experience where she taught at Mott Elementary school in D.C. in 1950, worked as a teacher/director at the U.S. Army GED program in Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County Virginia, and later taught at a one room school house in Huntley, Virginia.

African American elementary schools.

Howard University.

Education-- Virginia--Fort Belvoir.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_002, TRT: 0:29:34
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower describes his participation in school plays as a child, including the Nut Cracker. He comments on him and other classmates' involvement in activities such as safety patrol which eventually prepared them for leadership roles. Hightower then discusses attending Banneker Junior High School and McKinley High School Science and Technical School in Washington, D.C where he graduated at the age of 16 in 1958. However,

Hightower notes that despite integration efforts in Washington, D.C. public schools, he experienced discrimination. Hightower explains how he never focused on the discrimination and segregation in the D.C. area because he felt he had other educational opportunities. He also shares his experiences as a swimming instructor at Atwater in Washington, D.C. He concludes the interview by noting that he received an appointment to West Point, Virginia, but decided to enroll at Howard University as a top ROTC and distinguished military graduate.

Education--Washington (D.C.)--History.

Segregation in education--Washington (D.C.).

Washington (D.C.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower talks about his educational experiences at Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he majored in education, political science, physical education and took thirty-five credit hours a semester. He also says that former Howard University President H. Patrick Swygert and Togo Dennis West, Jr., an attorney and public official who was the third United States Secretary of Veteran Affairs, were Hightower's roommates. Hightower gives further details about his time as president of the student council during his senior year at Howard University and how he helped arrange a public debate for human rights activist, Malcolm X, and civil rights activists Bayard Rustin, on the campus. After graduating from Howard on June 8, 1962, Hightower recalls his enlistment in the military a week later, on June 15, 1962, and proposing to his college sweetheart, Denia Stukes.

Swygert, H. Patrick.

West, Togo D.

Howard University--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_004, TRT: 0:29:57
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower discusses his eight-year career in the military service and the adversity he faced when he tried to leave. Hightower then describes the birth of his son Dennis Hightower, Jr. in 1965 and his daughter Dawn Hightower in 1968. Upon leaving the military in 1970, Hightower discusses how his family moved from Virginia when he received a job offer at Xerox. He reflects on receiving three promotions during his first two years at Xerox and then talks about his experiences at Harvard Business School, in which he declared that Harvard was his only choice for graduate school. Hightower closes the interview tape discussing some of his peers such as Ken Chenault, Debbie Lee, Deborah Lathen, and Julieanna Richardson.

Harvard Business School.

Xerox Corporation--Employees.

United States--Armed Forces--Vocational guidance.

African American families--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_005, TRT: 0:29:48
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower considers his career experiences and reflects on graduating from Harvard Business School in 1975. He recalls working at McKinzie & Company in Cleveland, Ohio where he served as an associate and then a senior associate for four years. Hightower discusses how he was then recruited by

General Electric (G.E.) before accepting a position as the V.P. of strategic planning for Mattel in 1981. He describes his stint at Mattel and his move to Europe to work for Disney, recalling some of the business practices the company used. Hightower remembers his first five years at Disney where he expanded the business endeavors in the Middle East and Africa. However, Hightower explains how he refused to go to Africa until apartheid was abolished. He then makes note of some of his co-workers, including businessman Michael Eisner.

Success in business.

Walt Disney Company--Employees.

Apartheid--Africa.

General Electric Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_006, TRT: 0:30:23
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower talks about his work for Disney, especially in European markets. He had a chance to meet European royalty and heads of state. Hightower then describes the relationship between himself and the other executives of Disney, Michael Eisner and Frank Wells. Eisner was very creative but not a very good manager while Wells was an effective operations officer; together Eisner and Wells made a good team. Hightower became the head of Disney's telecommunications and television division where he oversaw the acquisition of ABC television network. Hightower describes how he shaped ABC's lineup but ultimately found working in television unfulfilling. He chose to leave Disney to teach leadership and management at Harvard Business School. Hightower talks about how he decided to leave teaching for an executive position in Luxembourg. After he was diagnosed with cancer, Hightower decided to retire but still retained his positions on the boards of different companies.

Walt Disney Company--Employees.

Management.

Organizational effectiveness.

Harvard Business School--Faculty.

American Broadcasting Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_007, TRT: 0:08:02
2008/01/31

Dennis Hightower reflects on his life and discusses the happiest moments of his life, which include the birth of his children and his grandchildren and military accomplishments. He wants the next generation achieves more and does better than the previous generation. His words of wisdom for the next generation are that there is no substitution for excellence and no room for mediocrity. Hightower believes that in order to be successful students need to be ready to prepare, perform, and persevere. He would like to be remembered as a good person and businessman who happened to be African American. He would like his tombstone to read "Soldier, Business Leader, Educator."

Conduct of life.