Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Creator: West, Royce

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West,

Dates: May 12, 2010

Bulk Dates: 2010

Physical Description: 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:18:18).

Abstract: Lawyer and state senator Hon. Royce West (1952 - ) was Texas’ first African American chief felony prosecutor and has served as State Senator of the Texas twenty-third district. West was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 12, 2010, in Austin, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2010_020

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Royce West has received numerous accolades as a politician in addition to his responsibilities as managing partner of a law firm. He was born on September 26, 1952 in Annapolis, Maryland. West attended the University of Texas at Arlington where he received his B.A. and his M.A. degrees in Sociology. While an undergraduate, West became the first African American to serve as president of the Student Congress, foreshadowing later events. He went on to receive his J.D. degree from the University of Houston in 1979 and worked in the Harris County District Attorney’s Office before joining the Dallas County District Attorney’s office where he became Texas’ first African American chief felony prosecutor. Following his time there, in 1994, West became a senior partner at the Dallas law firm Robinson, West, and Gooden.

Since 1993, West has represented Dallas County (District 23) in the Texas Senate. He won the Democratic primary the previous year against Jerald Larry and Jesse Oliver with over 57 percent of the votes. He has served on Senate committees including Education, Finance, Health and Human Services, and Criminal Justice; has served as chair of committees on Jurisprudence and Higher Education, and is the current Chair of Intergovernmental Relations. He has also been appointed to the Education Commission of the States in 2005, the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee of the Council of State Governments in 2009, and the Southern Regional Education Board Legislative Advisory Council also in 2009. In 1994, West created the “One Community-One Child Program” to increase parental involvement in students’ academic careers. West furthered his law career by becoming managing partner of West & Associates, now a law firm of 11 attorneys in 1994. He was sworn in as President Pro Tempore of the Texas Senate in 2006 and during that period, served as Governor for a
Day.

West has received Honorary Doctor of Law degrees from Paul Quinn College and Huston-Tillotson College in 1997 and 2000, respectively. In 2001, his alma mater, the University of Texas, recognized him with a Distinguished Alumni Service Award. Texas Monthly Magazine named him of the “Ten Best Legislators in Texas” in 1999 and one of the “25 Most Powerful People in Texas Politics” in 2005. That same year, the Associated Press called him one of the “key players of the 2005 Legislature” in their “Movers and Shakers” list.

Royce West was interviewed by 'The HistoryMakers' on May 12, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Royce West was conducted by Denise Gines on May 12, 2010, in Austin, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Lawyer and state senator Hon. Royce West (1952 - ) was Texas’ first African American chief felony prosecutor and has served as State Senator of the Texas twenty-third district.

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:

West, Royce
Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hon. Royce West--Interviews

African American politicians--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Texas Senate

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

PoliticalMakers

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


Processing Information
This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/14/2013 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, May 12, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West, Section A2010_020_001_001, TRT: 0:29:39

Royce Barry West slates his interview and lists his favorites. West was born on September 26, 1952 in Annapolis, Maryland to Gloria Evelyn Morris Ashford of California and Willis Kevin West. Willis Kevin West was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. At eight years old Willis Kevin traveled by rail, taking odd jobs, and later joined the military. West's paternal grandfather, also named Willis, was born in Oklahoma but lived with his family for a time in San Antonio, Texas. The family relocated to Oklahoma when Willis and his brother Robert beat a white man to death. West's maternal grandfather joined the United States Navy as a cook and witnessed the sinking of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor. West and Samuel were very close. The family settled in Parole, Maryland where he attended Parole Elementary. West's neighborhood was racially and economically diverse, with working class people and professionals living near each other. West was a rambunctious but bright child who enjoyed roaming the neighborhood with his friends. He enjoyed Western television shows like Rawhide, Gunsmoke, Bat Masterson, and the legal drama Perry Mason. West's parents divorced when he was in the fourth grade. In the middle of the fifth grade, 1962-1963, West's mother moved with his enlisted stepfather Benjamin G. Ashford to Augsburg, Germany. After initial culture shocks West flourished.

Family--History.
African Americans--Social conditions.
African American families--Oklahoma.
African American families--Texas.
African American families--Maryland.
Military bases, American--Germany.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West, Section A2010_020_001_002, TRT: 0:29:52

In 1964 West's stepfather moved the family to his native Dallas, Texas.
West experienced culture shock because of his hairstyle and dialect. He developed many lifelong friendships there. West's family moved from Benjamin's parents home to a Dallas housing project. He did well in school but longed to play football. His favorite Junior High instructor was his government teacher Gloria White with whom he maintained a friendship. White's influence and other events encouraged his interest in law. West attended various churches and came to like Proverbs. His family moved to a middle class community in Highland Hills, near Bishop College. West worked at the nearby 7-11 for three years and socialized with students and visitors using Bishop's non segregated facilities. His exposure to the collegiate atmosphere instilled a desire for higher education. Wilmer Hutchins High School was a traditionally white institution with limited black enrollment and sports participation by 1967. West encountered explicit racism.

Family--History.
African Americans--Social conditions.
African Americans--Religion.
African Americans--Education.
Dallas (Tex.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West, Section A2010_020_001_003, TRT: 0:30:18

West and his friends used their favorite coach and librarian as sounding boards to judge the level of fairness or discrimination they encountered. West was the first in his family to graduate from college. His basketball coach obfuscated letters of inquiry so West instead played basketball in Paris Junior College for six months. West presided over the Methodist student union and he was labeled a black militant. He transferred to play football for the University of Texas at Arlington but quit following a poor grade and greater responsibilities. He became a sociology research assistant. West was elected President of the student body and spearheaded several initiatives that strengthened the organization's solvency and improved university facilities management. West graduated from law school and finished his sociology masters thesis in 1979. He opted to study for the bar exam rather than try out for the Houston Oilers. He barely passed the exam thanks to, he claimed, the intervention of God.

African Americans--Social conditions.
African Americans--Religion.
African Americans--Education.
Dallas (Tex.)--Race relations.
Segregation in education--United States.
University of Texas at Arlington--Alumni and alumnae.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West, Section A2010_020_001_004, TRT: 0:29:51

West worked in Dallas County for five years and was the first black Chief Felony Prosecutor. West worked with Henry Wade, of Roe v. Wade fame. The office was previously notorious for being devoid of
black jurists and when West arrived, out of 100 attorneys, only two were black and none were Hispanic. Three court room incidents underscored lingering racism and controversies surrounding race in law. West went into private practice in February 1984 with borrowed money from his paternal grandfather who reminded him families are often the bank of last resort so it was crucial to pay him back. West did not have tax problems but learned early on about the importance of accounting for them in his revenue. West’s highest profile case was representing Michael Irving then of the Dallas Cowboys. West successfully ran for Texas State Senate where he championed juvenile education and crime prevention.

Diversity in the workplace--United States.
African Americans--Texas.
Minorities--Employment--United States.
Juvenile delinquency.
Public welfare.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Royce West, Section A2010_020_001_005, TRT: 0:18:38

The demographics in West’s district changed to 50% Hispanic and he changed his bills to accommodate this. West helped create the Dr. Emmet J. Conrad Internship Program facilitates paid summer internships. One Community One Child was a pilot project he helped create to test a hypothesis that an elementary school’s problems caused by low parent participation could improve if employers gave parents two unscheduled days off a semester to attend conferences or other school functions. West was appointed the Chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on Gangs and Juvenile Justice and the appointment instilled into him the importance of youth intervention. His appointment coincided with the lynching-by-dragging of James Byrd, Jr. An initially unsettling encounter with Lt. Governor Bob Bullock matured West considerably. West helped legislation to create the University of North Texas At Dallas. He appreciates accolades but tries to be humble and believes his true reward will be in heaven.

Juvenile delinquency.
Bullock, Bob.
Minorities--Education (Higher)--United States.
Education--Parent participation.
Representative government and representation--Demographic aspects--United States.