

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr.

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Britton, Theodore R., 1925-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr.,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | April 9, 2013  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2013   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:43:19).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Sergeant and foreign ambassador The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr. (1925 - ) served as the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and Grenada and as the U. S. Special Representative to Antigua, Dominica, St. Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. On June 30, 2012, Britton was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of his services with the U.S. Marine Corps' Montford Point Marines. Britton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 9, 2013, in Avondale Estates, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2013_097  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ambassador Theodore R. Britton Jr. was born on October 17, 1925 in North Augusta, South Carolina to Bessie B. and Theodore R. Britton, Sr. His family relocated to New York City in 1936. Britton left high school in January of 1944 to join the U. S. Marine Corps where he served in the Pacific Theater during World War II. After being discharged, he enrolled at New York University until the beginning of the Korean War. Britton was then called to active duty with the U.S. Marine Corps where he served until May of 1951. He then resumed his studies at New York University and graduated with his B.A. degree in banking and finance in February of 1952.

Britton worked as a mortgage officer and head of the mortgage department at Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association from 1955 to 1964. From there, he became president of the American Baptist Convention and a leader in the non-profit housing field. Britton was then invited to join the federal government by Harry Finger, who was head of Research and Technology in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Britton closed his offices in New York and Pennsylvania and decided to join HUD in 1971 as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology. As the HUD official managing international research, his volunteer program for the U. S. Information Agency attracted favorable attention. Britton was nominated by President Gerald R. Ford to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and Grenada and as the U. S. Special Representative to Antigua, Dominica, St. Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia and St. Vincent on November 17, 1974. Britton was elected as vice-chair of the Group on Urban Affairs at the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1971, and later as president. His resignation as Ambassador was accepted by President Jimmy Carter in May of 1977.

Upon retirement, Britton was honored by the City Councils of Newark, New Jersey and Washington, D.C. He presented with the Congressional Gold Medal on June 30, 2012 in recognition of his services with the U.S. Marine

Corps' Montford Point Marines. Britton is a Life Member of the Second Marine Division, Montford Point Marine Association, and the Association for Intelligence Officers. On March 2, 2013, he joined the Marine Corps Commandant and other officials as a U. S. Navy ship was christened to honor the Montford Point Marines. Britton has served as Honorary Consul General for the Republic of Albania since 2006. He is also the Honorary Chairman of Kristal University in Tirana, Albania where her was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws degree in 2009.

Britton was married in 1950 to the late Ruth B. A. Baker of Fort Worth, Texas. He is currently married to Vernell Elizabeth Stewart of Jacksonville, Florida.

Ambassador Theodore R. Britton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 9, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 9, 2013, in Avondale Estates, Georgia, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Sergeant and foreign ambassador The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr. (1925 - ) served as the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and Grenada and as the U. S. Special Representative to Antigua, Dominica, St. Christopher-Nevis-Anguilla, St. Lucia and St. Vincent. On June 30, 2012, Britton was presented with the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of his services with the U.S. Marine Corps' Montford Point Marines.

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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:

Britton, Theodore R., 1925-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Britton, Theodore R., 1925- --Interviews

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United States--Armed Forces--African American Officers--Interviews.

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African American diplomats--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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United States. Marine Corps Montford Point Marine Association Montford Point Camp (Camp, Lejune, N.C.)

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United States. Dept. of State

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## Occupations:

Sergeant

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Foreign Ambassador

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers|PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., April 9, 2013. 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).

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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 The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:51 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. describes his family background. Britton's parents, Bessie Bell Cook Britton and Theodore Roosevelt Britton, were born in Aiken County, South Carolina around 1904 and 1901, respectively. Britton explains how his parents met and how his personality is similar to that of his father's. Britton also talks about his father's migration to New York in 1935 and how his father sent for the rest of the family: Britton, his mother and two sisters, that following year. Britton's maternal grandfather, John Cook, was born in the 1800s and was of African American and Native American descent. His maternal grandmother's family name was Rivers. She had blonde hair and blue eyes, and her father was reputed to be a member of the wealthy white Hammond family of South Carolina. Britton's paternal grandfather and grandmother were born in 1884 and 1879, respectively and grew up in Edgefield, South Carolina.

African American families.

African American mothers--South Carolina.

African American fathers--South Carolina.

African American grandparents.

Racially mixed people.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:17 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. describes his earliest childhood memory, and the sights, sounds and smells of growing up in South Carolina and New York City. At ten years old, Britton was promoted to the seventh grade in South Carolina. However, when his family moved to New York City, Britton had to return to the fourth grade. Britton attended the High School of Commerce and remembers his high school teacher, L. Walter Stevens, who had a profound influence on him. Stevens studied under Woodrow Wilson at Princeton University. Britton describes his high school coursework and the various jobs he had while attending school. Britton also discusses how delivering clothes for a dry cleaners, led to his participation in the 1940s labor movement.

Childhood--South Carolina.

Education--New York (State)--New York.

Princeton University.

Wilson, Woodrow, 1856-1924.

Labor unions--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:19 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. talks about his career plans following high school and joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 1943. He discusses his arrival at Montford Point in North Carolina and his boot camp training. He also talks about the treatment of blacks in the military, which ranged from prejudice, discrimination and segregation to white Marines befriending black Marines. Britton talks about becoming a clerk in the U.S. Marine Corps after graduating from boot camp. In 1944, Britton was shipped overseas to Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. He talks about how the participation of black Marines in the Battle of Guadalcanal during World War II changed whites' perspective on blacks in combat.

United States. Marine Corps.

Montford Point Camp (Camp Lejeune, N.C.).

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Segregation.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Solomon Islands--Guadalcanal.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:57 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. describes his experience on the U.S. Navy Ship, "Sea Perch" and his tour of duty on Guadalcanal. From Guadalcanal, Britton went to Hawaii in April of 1945, where he remained until returning to the United States in May of 1946. He speaks about his involvement with the Society for the Study of Negro History in New York--an association originally started by African American historian, Carter G. Woodson. Britton also discusses his involvement in the Greater Harlem Christian Youth Council, based out of Abyssinian Baptist Church. His participation in the group led to Britton becoming a Scout Master and getting to know African American pastor and politician, Adam Clayton Powell. Britton graduated with his B.A. degree in banking and finance from New York University in February of 1952. He explains his decision to pursue a career in banking and finance.

World War, 1939-1945--Campaigns--Solomon Islands--Guadalcanal.

Hawaii.

Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, inc.

Powell, Adam Clayton, 1908-1972.

African American churches.

New York University.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:26 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. discusses his attendance at New York University. He mentions that while participating in NYU's Glee Club, he once roomed with African American singer, Paul Robeson's son at Cornell University. Britton talks about Robeson and his friend, Investment Banker, John L. Loeb, Jr. Britton began working as a teller at Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association in 1955. From 1955 to 1964, he also worked as a mortgage officer and became head of the mortgage department. While employed at Carver Federal Savings, Britton enrolled in the American Savings and Loan Institute and earned two diplomas.

New York University.  
Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976.  
Glees, catches, rounds, etc.  
Finance.  
American Savings and Loan Institute.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:08 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. discusses highlights from his career at Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association. In 1964, Britton left Carver Federal Savings and became manager of real estate and insurance at American Baptist Convention. He explains that his work at American Baptist Convention led to his recognition by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1969. Britton discusses being invited to speak for the U.S. Information Agency by African American diplomat, Horace Dawson; as well as his own nomination for ambassador in 1974. Britton remembers learning about the death of his friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He mentions being Malcolm X's banker and talks about meeting other important African American leaders of the late 1960s. Britton also discusses the growth and development of minority business during this period.

Finance.  
American Baptist Convention.  
Dawson, Horace G. (Horace Greeley), 1926-  
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.  
X, Malcolm, 1925-1965.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_007, TRT: 7:28:10 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. discusses African American civil rights leader, James Forman and his interruption of a Riverside Church service in New York City to demand reparations. Britton explains that after Forman's protest; the church formed the Riverside Fund for Social Justice and raised a quarter of a million dollars for the community. Britton speaks about former President Richard Nixon's black capitalism initiative and African American diplomats, Horace Dawson and Edward R. Dudley. Britton also explains how former Senator Strom Thurmond helped him become an ambassador. Britton describes being an U.S. Ambassador to Barbados and Grenada. He fondly recalls meeting Queen Elizabeth II, and a special moment he shared with former President Nixon. Britton also speaks about getting to know columnist, Jack Anderson and meeting entertainer, Danny Kaye.

Forman, James, 1928-2005.  
Riverside Church (New York, N.Y.)  
Thurmond, Strom, 1902-2003.  
United States. Embassy (Barbados)  
Elizabeth--II,--Queen of Great Britain,--1926-  
Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_008, TRT: 8:32:14 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. recalls highlights from his career as chief admission ambassador to Barbados and Grenada. Britton describes his time as ambassador as a great experience and remembers the huge outpouring of condolences he

received when his son died in 1967. Britton resigned as ambassador to Barbados and Grenada in 1977. Shortly after, he became president of the United Mutual Life Insurance Company. He recounts his experience at the company and explains why he left. Britton also discusses being asked to head international research for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the 1980s. He discusses his international work with HUD and his testimony before the Development Policy in the Caribbean Committee in 1988.

United States. Embassy (Barbados)

Death.

Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York.

United States.--Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Caribbean Area--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_009, TRT: 9:28:46 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. talks about the Association of Black American Ambassadors and their meeting at Howard University in 1991. He explains that the association was started in the mid-1980s by Franklin Williams, former President of the Phelps Stokes Fund. Britton discusses his professional activities since Bill Clinton's presidency. He worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Boston office and became Counsel General to Albania in 2006. Britton reflects upon his legacy and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also talks about his family.

Association of Black American Ambassadors.

Howard University.

United States.--Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Urban policy--United States.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore Britton, Jr., Section  
A2013\_097\_001\_010, TRT: 10:14:11 ?

Theodore R. Britton, Jr. discusses People to People International and the benefits of being an ambassador. Britton also talks about how he would like to be remembered; explaining that he would like to be thought of as someone who made a positive contribution to the world. Britton concludes his interview by sharing photographs of his wife, family, and travels as a U.S. ambassador.

People-to-People (Organization)

Diplomats--United States.

Reminiscing.

Photographs.