

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.

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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>	Peavy, John W., 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 2, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:51:26).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Judge John W. Peavy, Jr. (1942 - ) served as justice of the peace from 1974 to 1977, and as district judge from 1977 to 1994 in Houston, Texas, in addition to directing Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum. Peavy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2016, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_130
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge John W. Peavy, Jr. was born on April 28, 1942 in Houston, Texas to Malinda Terrell Peavy and John W. Peavy, Sr. Peavy graduated from Phyllis Wheatley High School in 1960, where he began his lifelong engagement in local politics as a member of the Young Democrats of Harris County. He then enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he earned his B.A. degree in business administration with an emphasis in accountancy in 1964. Peavy worked for Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson's office as an undergraduate student, and later as a White House staffer during Johnson's presidency. In 1967, Peavy

received his J.D. degree from the Howard University School of Law.

Upon graduating from law school, Peavy returned to Houston, and opened a private law practice focused on criminal and civil cases. In 1967, he joined the Harris County Community Action Association as an associate senior coordinator; and, in 1969, he became an executive assistant to Harris County Judge William Elliot. He then worked as an expert for the American Bar Association's Project Home, where he handled real estate cases for the NAACP. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the program provided legal and technical assistance to federal housing programs. Peavy also served on the Houston City Council. In 1973, Judge William Elliott appointed Peavy as justice of the peace for a newly formed, majority-black district in Harris County. He was later elected for a full term in 1974, serving until 1977 when he was appointed by Governor Dolph Briscoe as judge of the 246th District Court. There, he presided over family law cases, and helped reform the family court system through his endorsement of mediation programs within the court system in 1985. In 1990, Peavy was placed in charge of family law courts for all of Harris County. Peavy retired from his district court judgeship in 1994.

Peavy was a member of the Houston Area Urban League, the NAACP, and the U.S.-China Friendship Association. He also served as the director of the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas. In 2018, Peavy was honored with a historic portrait at the Harris County District Civil Courthouse.

Peavy and his wife, Diane Massey, have four children.

Judge John W. Peavy, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 2, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 2, 2016, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Judge John W. Peavy, Jr. (1942 - ) served as justice of the peace from 1974 to 1977, and as district judge from 1977 to 1994 in Houston, Texas, in addition to directing Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum.

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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:**

Peavy, John W., 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Peavy, John W., 1942---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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## **Occupations:**

State Court Judge

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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 The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr., December 2, 2016. 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 The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:54 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. was born on April 28, 1942 in Houston, Texas to Malinda Terrell Peavy and John W. Peavy, Sr. His maternal great-grandfather, Alexander Terrell, was born a slave in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1830s, and moved to Anderson, Texas around 1865. His son, who was also named Alexander Terrell, became an educator at the all-black school in Grimes County, Texas. Peavy's mother was born and raised in Anderson, and studied to become a teacher at the Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College. Peavy's paternal great-grandfather, Eb Haynie, was a cotton farmer in Grimes County. His paternal grandparents, Lula Haynie Peavy and John Peavy, lived in Anderson, where Peavy's father was born. Peavy's parents met and married in Anderson, and settled in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas. There, his mother worked an educator, while his father was an entrepreneur, community organizer and Democratic precinct captain. Peavy had two older sisters, Shirley Peavy Peart and Johnnie Peavy Viser.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:00 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. grew up during the 1950s in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas, which was a flourishing, economically diverse black community. His family belonged to the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, which was one of the largest churches in the Fifth Ward. Peavy attended Blanche Kelso Bruce Elementary School, E. O. Smith Middle School and Phillis Wheatley High

School, which was one of the largest schools in the country. There, he pursued the accounting and business track, became a colonel in the JROTC and played clarinet in the band. His classmates included Beneva Williams Nyamu, who filed suit to integrate the Houston Independent School District in 1956. Upon graduating in 1960, Peavy enrolled at Howard University, where he studied business and accounting. As a result of his father's position in the Democratic Party, Peavy was hired as one of the first African American aides in the White House, where he met journalists Louis E. Martin and Bill D. Moyers.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:03 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. attended Howard University during the early 1960s, and lived on the same hall as Stokely Carmichael and Henry "Hank" Thomas. He joined the ROTC and considered pursuing a career in the U.S. military career, but preferred his work as a civil servant in the White House. In 1964, Peavy enrolled in the Howard University School of Law with a scholarship from the Ford Foundation. He excelled academically under the tutelage of attorneys like Thurgood Marshall and Herbert O. Reid, Sr. Upon graduating in 1967, Peavy declined a position as a tax attorney with the Shell Oil Company, and instead returned to Houston, Texas to become a field coordinator for the Harris County Community Action Association. In this role, he worked with leaders like Ovide Duncantell and Lee Otis Johnson to organize the community and agitate for street repair, sanitation and the opening of multiservice centers in black neighborhoods.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:27 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. worked with the Harris County Community Action Association from 1964 to 1969. During that time, he pressured the City of Houston to pave streets, maintain vacant lots and demolish abandoned buildings in black communities, in collaboration with community leaders Al Henry and Pluria Marshall, Sr. In 1969, Peavy became an executive assistant to Harris County Judge William Elliott. He was

the second African American to fill the role, preceded by Barbara Jordan. Peavy and Anthony W. Hall, Jr. were the only black employees in the Harris County courthouse at the time. Then, Peavy worked briefly as an expert for the American Bar Association's Project Home. Funded by Senator John Tower and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the program provided legal and technical support to attorneys who advocated for low income housing. In 1973, Judge William Elliott appointed Peavy as justice of the peace for a newly formed, majority-black district in Harris County.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:31 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. was elected to a full term as justice of the peace for Harris County, Texas in 1974. Three year later, prior to the completion of his term, Peavy was appointed by Governor Dolph Briscoe as the judge of the 246th District Court, which was a newly established family law court. In 1978, Peavy was elected to the position, where he remained until 1994. As a family law judge, he advocated for in-person mediation as a prerequisite to appearing in court, which eventually became mandatory under Texas law. In 1990, Peavy was placed in charge of family law courts for all of Harris County. He lost his reelection bid in 1994, but continued hearing cases as a visiting judge. In 1997, Peavy was charged with bribery in relation to a hotel development in Houston, and was subsequently acquitted. After retiring from the judiciary in the early 2010s, Peavy focused on operating his airport concession businesses and managing his family's real estate in the Fifth Ward.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr.,  
Section A2016\_130\_001\_006, TRT: 6:25:31 2016/12/02

The Honorable John W. Peavy, Jr. served as the judge of the 246th Family District Court in Harris County, Texas from 1977 to 1994. During this time, he frequently experienced racial discrimination from his constituents and the parties in his courtroom. However, he did not allow racism to sway his decisions, and always ruled in accordance with the law. Peavy describes his judicial philosophy, and talks about the need to elect more African

Americans to the judiciary. He reflects upon his life, family and how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.