

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Jesse White

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	White, Jesse, 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White,
Dates:	April 3, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:38:20).
Abstract:	State government appointee The Honorable Jesse White (1934 -) was the first African American to be elected as Secretary of State for Illinois, and was the founder of the world renowned Jesse White Tumblers youth tumbling team. White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 3, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_085
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

State government appointee Jesse White was born on June 23, 1934 in Alton, Illinois. In 1943, he moved to Chicago with his parents, where he attended Schiller Elementary School. He went on to attend Waller High School, where he was active in school athletics, being named All-City in basketball and baseball. He also excelled at tumbling and hoped to play professional baseball after graduation, fielding offers from the St. Louis Browns and the Pittsburgh Pirates. However, White's father insisted that he first go to college. White enrolled at Alabama State College, majoring in physical education. He also played baseball and basketball, earning All-Conference honors in both sports.

Upon graduation, White signed with the Chicago Cubs organization. However, four days before leaving for spring training, he was drafted by the United States Army, where he attended jump school and was trained as a paratrooper. White was soon assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. After his discharge in 1959, White returned to Chicago, where he finally began his professional baseball career, playing for several seasons with the Chicago Cubs organization.

Off-season, White also worked as a physical education instructor at Schiller Elementary School, the school that he attended as a child, as well as with the Chicago Park District. In December 1959, White was asked to organize a gym show at the Rockwell Garden Housing Project. This show laid the foundation for what would become known worldwide as the Jesse White Tumbling Team. For over forty years, the Jesse White Tumbling Team has served as a positive alternative for over 5,000 underprivileged Chicago children.

As White continued to juggle teaching and tumbling, he was approached to run for a seat in the state legislature, replacing Robert Thompson, who was retiring. In 1974, he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served on the Committees on Aging, Elementary & Secondary Education, Public Utilities, and chaired the Committee on Children and Human Services. Among the bills proposed by White in the House was the Good

Samaritan Bill, which allowed hotels to offer leftover food to soup kitchens without threat of liability.

With the exception of the 1977-79 term, White served in the Illinois General Assembly until 1992 when he was elected Cook County Recorder of Deeds. In 1996, he was reelected to the same office and served until 1998, when he made history by being the first African American elected Secretary of State for Illinois. The Secretary of State's office is responsible for issuing license plates and titles, maintaining driver records and overseeing the State Library, State Archives and the organ and tissue donor program.

The father of two daughters, White has had a varied career and a strong impact both inside and outside the world of politics.

White was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 3, 2001.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Jesse White was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 3, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. State government appointee The Honorable Jesse White (1934 -) was the first African American to be elected as Secretary of State for Illinois, and was the founder of the world renowned Jesse White Tumblers youth tumbling team.

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:

White, Jesse, 1934-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Haynes, Frank (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
White, Jesse, 1934---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Illinois. Office of Secretary of State

Occupations:

State Government Appointee

HistoryMakers® Category:

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White, April 3, 2001. 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).

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 The Honorable Jesse White, Section A2001_085_001_001,
TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Jesse White narrates his photographs and talks about his family history. White's father Jesse White, Sr. was born in Caruthersville, Missouri and raised in Humble, Tennessee. He moved to Alton, Illinois and worked in the fruit and produce industry. White's mother, Julia Mae White, was born in Earle, Arkansas and later moved to Alton, Illinois. She married Charles Shaw and they had three children before he passed away of Typhoid Fever. Jesse White, Sr. and Julia Mae White married in Alton, Illinois and had four children. In 1943, White parents moved to the Near North Side of Chicago, Illinois. White remembers this neighborhood being diverse and supportive. He attended the integrated Schiller Elementary School and Waller High School, and being captain of his high school basketball team.

African American families--Illinois.

School integration--Illinois--Chicago.

African American youth--Education.

African American families--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White, Section A2001_085_001_002,
TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Jesse White describes his experience in childhood and his life before becoming a politician. He recalls growing up on public aid, his passion for sports, and the men who mentored him. In 1952, White enrolled in Alabama State College (now Alabama State University) in Montgomery, Alabama, where he played baseball and basketball and decided to become a teacher. White remembers his first encounter with segregation when he was asked to move to the back of a bus. White graduated from college in 1957 and signed a contract to play baseball for the Chicago Cubs when he was drafted into the United States Army. White spent two years in the 101 Airborne Division before returning to Chicago to teach at Schiller Elementary School, play baseball, and work in the Park District. In December of 1959, White started the successful Jesse White Tumbling Team as a way to give back to the community. In 1974, White ran to replace Robert L. Thompson as Illinois State Representative for the 13th District.

African Americans--Economic conditions.

African Americans--Segregation--Alabama.

African American athletes.

African Americans--Military service.

African American teachers--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Politics and government--20th century.

Jesse White Tumbling Team.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White, Section A2001_085_001_003,
TRT: 0:31:19 ?

Jesse White describes his careers as a baseball player and an Illinois State

Representative. White remembers encountering segregation and racism in several of the cities he played in, including Plainview, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; and one violent encounter in Duluth, Minnesota. After playing baseball professionally from 1959 to 1968, White settled in Chicago and focused on teaching at Schiller Elementary School and coaching the Jesse White Tumbling Team. In 1975, at the suggestion of George Dunne, White took over Robert L. Thompson's seat in the Illinois General Assembly representing the 13th District. White remembers being initially nervous about taking the position, but found strength in his civic duty and helping others. He reflects on the importance of the Illinois General Assembly and on his proudest accomplishments as a State Representative.

African American baseball players.

African American teachers and the community.

Jesse White Tumbling Team.

Dunne, George W., 1913-

Illinois. General Assembly--House of Representatives.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White, Section A2001_085_001_004, TRT: 0:05:02 ?

Jesse White discusses his career as an Illinois State Representative, Cook County Recorder of Deeds, and Illinois Secretary of State. After sixteen years as a State Representative, White became the Cook County Recorder of Deeds in 1992, succeeding Carol Moseley Braun. In this position, he modernized, streamlined, computerized the office. In 1999, White defeated Al Salvi to become Illinois Secretary of State. White discusses his accomplishments as Secretary of State, including his reforms of drivers' licenses, increased literacy and library grants, and increased involvement in the organ donor program. White also discusses the importance of sports and education for helping improve the African American community by increasing opportunities and building positive relationships.

African Americans--Politics and government--20th century.

Illinois. Secretary of State, Office of.

Illinois. General Assembly--House of Representatives.

Jesse White Tumbling Team.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jesse White, Section A2001_085_001_005, TRT: ?

Jesse White reflects upon his career and legacy.

African Americans--Politics and government--20th century.

Illinois. Secretary of State, Office of.

Jesse White Tumbling Team.