

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Burl Toler, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Toler, Burl, 1928-2009
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Burl Toler, Sr.,
Dates:	April 7, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:40).
Abstract:	Football referee Burl Toler, Sr. (1928 - 2009) was the first African American official in the National Football League. Toler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 7, 2006, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_069
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Burl Toler, Sr. was born on May 9, 1928 in Memphis, Tennessee. He was one of four children born to Pullman Porter A.W. Toler and educator Annie King Toler. Throughout his childhood, Toler's parents stressed education. Upon graduating from high school, Toler decided to enroll in Lemoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee. In the early 1950s, Toler moved to San Francisco, California enrolling in the City College of San Francisco. Toler played on the college football team and was named All-American player in the Junior College division. This honor afforded him the opportunity to receive a full four year scholarship to play football at the University of San Francisco.

Toler majored in education while playing as a linebacker with the University of San Francisco Dons. In 1951, Toler and his team were undefeated with a perfect 9-0 season. Toler was drafted into the National Football League (NFL) in 1952 by the Cleveland Browns. He injured his knee during an all-star game that ended his opportunity to play professional football. Shortly thereafter, he became a teacher at Benjamin Franklin Middle School in San Francisco. He also began officiating college games in the San Francisco area. Toler became the first African American football official for the NFL in 1965, later officiating three NFL Super Bowl games. He retired as a NFL official in 1991. The book *Undefeated, Untied and Uninvited*, the story of the 1951 University of San Francisco Dons has been turned into a screenplay by former San Francisco 49er player Jamie Williams.

During the course of his seventeen year career at Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Toler served as the first African American secondary school principal in the district. The city council honored Toler by renaming the school Burl A. Toler Middle School. Toler was inducted in the City College and University of San Francisco Hall of Fame. He received several awards including the Isaac Hayes Achievement in Sports Award and the University of San Francisco Alumnus of the Year. The Burl A. Toler, Sr. Scholarship has been named in Toler's honor at St. Ignatius College Preparatory School in San Francisco.

Toler retired and lived in San Francisco, but he continued to work as an evaluator and recruiter for NFL referees.

Toler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 7, 2006.

Toler passed away on August 16, 2009.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Burl Toler, Sr. was conducted by Loretta Henry on April 7, 2006, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Football referee Burl Toler, Sr. (1928 - 2009) was the first African American official in the National Football League.

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:

Toler, Burl, 1928-2009

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Toler, Burl, 1928-2009 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Football League.

Occupations:

Football Referee

HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

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 Burl Toler, Sr., April 7, 2006. 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 Burl Toler, Sr., Section A2006_069_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?
Burl Toler, Sr. was born on May 9, 1928 in Memphis, Tennessee to Annie King Toler and Arnold Toler, Sr. His maternal grandfather, David King, was from

Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he maintained a family farm and produced cotton, hay and milk. Toler's mother was born in Vicksburg, where she worked on the farm, and then enrolled at Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi to train as a schoolteacher. His father worked as a Pullman porter, and included his children on his frequent travels. Toler's parents had four children, including his siblings Arnold Toler, Jr., David Toler, and Gwendolyn Toler. He was raised in a predominantly black neighborhood in Memphis, where he recalls fashioning makeshift toys, belonging to the Baptist Young People's Union of America, and parents who often supervised neighbors' children. Each summer, Toler helped his grandfather on the farm in Mississippi. He attended elementary school, where his favorite subject was math, and then graduated from Memphis' Manassas High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Burl Toler, Sr., Section A2006_069_001_002, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Burl Toler, Sr. studied engineering briefly at LeMoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee. He then moved to San Francisco, California, where he was a store clerk for his uncle, Louis C. King, and enrolled at the City College of San Francisco. On the college football team, Toler was named a junior college All-American. He frequented Oakland's DeFremery Recreation Center and befriended its director, Dorothy Pitts. Toler transferred to the University of San Francisco, where he and Ollie Matson were the stars of the undefeated 1951 football club. Due to an injury in the Chicago Charities College All-Star Game, he did not pursue a professional sports career. Instead, Toler became a math teacher at Benjamin Franklin Junior High School in San Francisco, where he worked for seventeen years and was later promoted to principal. While teaching, he qualified to become the first black official in the National Football League, and specialized as a line judge. In 2006, Franklin was renamed Burl A. Toler Campus in his honor.

Video Oral History Interview with Burl Toler, Sr., Section A2006_069_001_003, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

Burl Toler, Sr. played on the University of San Francisco (USF) football team in 1951, when the team went undefeated. USF refused to play in the Orange Bowl when the organizers demanded that he and his teammate Ollie Matson be removed from play due to their race. Athletic director Pete Rozelle soon ended the football program for lack of funds. Toler sustained an injury in the Chicago Charities College All-Star Game and was unable to pursue a professional career, so he instead became a college football referee. Rozelle became the commissioner of the National Football League, and in 1965, he hired Toler as its first black official. Toler officiated for twenty-five seasons, including three Super Bowls, and continued his career in education during the week. In 1970, he became director of personnel at City College of San Francisco. After retiring as an official in 1990, he became an evaluator of other referees for the NFL. He raised six children in San Francisco with his wife, Melvia Woolfolk Toler.

Video Oral History Interview with Burl Toler, Sr., Section A2006_069_001_004, TRT: 0:27:10 ?

Burl Toler, Sr. served as the director of personnel at the City College of San Francisco from 1970 to 1991, where he worked alongside Rena Bancroft, who was the college's president from 1985 to 1990. He was active in the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, which he joined during his college years, and a scholarship awarded to graduates of San Francisco's St. Ignatius College Preparatory was named in Toler's honor. Toler was inducted into the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame, the University of San Francisco Hall of Fame, and the City College Hall of Fame. Since his retirement in the 1990s, he has appeared on 'The Best Damn Sports Show Period' and was named San Franciscan of the Year in 2004. Toler reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the

interview by narrating his photographs.