

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dennis Hightower

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hightower, Dennis (Dennis Fowler), 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower,
Dates:	January 31, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:06:01).
Abstract:	Business professor and broadcast executive Dennis Hightower (1941 -) was the president of Walt Disney Television and Communications. As president, he oversaw Disney's acquisition of ABC, ABC Family, ESPN, A&E and Lifetime Networks. Upon his retirement in June 1996, Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program. He also acted as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce from 2009 to 2010. Hightower was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_004
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive and business professor Dennis Fowler Hightower was born on October 28, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Marvin William Hightower and Virginia Fowler Hightower, an educator. After graduating from McKinley High School in 1958, Hightower attended Howard University where he earned his B.S degree in 1962. In addition to joining Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and being a college athlete, Hightower was the top graduating cadet of the Army ROTC university program.

After graduating from Howard University, Hightower was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, where he served as a platoon leader and company commander in the 101st Airborne Division. Afterwards, Hightower was trained as a counterintelligence officer and field operations intelligence officer, working in strategic and operational assignments in the United States and abroad. Hightower also served in Vietnam in the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, where he was promoted to the rank of major. Hightower was awarded two Bronze Star medals, a Purple Heart, three Air Medals, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, five Army Commendation Medals with distinction for valor, the Vietnam Honor Medal First Class, and the Combat Infantryman Badge.

In 1970, Hightower was hired by Xerox as manager of organizational planning. He left his position there in 1972, when he was awarded a fellowship to attend Harvard Business School. He graduated in 1974 with his M.B.A. Hightower then joined McKinsey & Company and worked as a senior associate and engagement manager until 1978, when he was hired by General Electric's Lighting Business Group. In 1987, Hightower was hired by The Walt Disney Company as vice president of Consumer Products for Europe, based in Paris, France, and later became president of Consumer Products for Europe, Middle East and Africa divisions. In 1995, he was promoted

to president of Walt Disney Television and Telecommunications.

Upon his retirement in 1996, Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program. On August 11, 2009, Hightower was appointed by President Barack Obama as deputy secretary of commerce. Hightower was charged with general management duties until his tenure ended on August 27, 2010.

His numerous awards include the U.S. Department of Commerce Pioneer Award; Harvard Business School Alumni Achievement Award and Bert King Service Award; and an honorary doctorate degree and Alumni Achievement Award for Business from Howard University. He is a board member of Accenture, Ltd., Brown Capital Management, Domino's Pizza, Inc. and Casey Family Programs, and a former trustee at Howard University.

Dennis Fowler Hightower was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 31, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dennis Hightower was conducted by Cheryl Butler on January 31, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Business professor and broadcast executive Dennis Hightower (1941 -) was the president of Walt Disney Television and Communications. As president, he oversaw Disney's acquisition of ABC, ABC Family, ESPN, A&E and Lifetime Networks. Upon his retirement in June 1996, Hightower joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, initially as a senior lecturer and then as a professor of management in the M.B.A. program. He also acted as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce from 2009 to 2010.

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:

Hightower, Dennis (Dennis Fowler), 1941-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hightower, Dennis (Dennis Fowler), 1941- --Interviews

African American executives--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Walt Disney Company--Interviews.

Harvard University--Faculty--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Harvard Business School.

Walt Disney Company.

Occupations:

Business Professor

Broadcast Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Dennis Hightower, January 31, 2008. 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 Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_001, TRT: 0:28:27
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Dennis Hightower was born on October 28, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Anna Fowler Hightower and Marvin W. Hightower. Hightower's paternal great-grandmother, Anna Churn Hightower, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana to a French Huguenot immigrant. His maternal great-aunt, Beulah Fowler Williams, was one of the first African American registered nurses to graduate from the Grady Memorial Hospital Municipal Training School for Colored Nurses in Atlanta, Georgia. Her brother, Sylvester Fowler, was a prominent businessman in Marietta, Georgia. Hightower's maternal grandfather, George Fowler, attended Atlanta University in Atlanta before moving his family to Washington, D.C., where he and his wife, Lillian Taylor Fowler, worked for the national government. Hightower's maternal uncle, James Fowler, Sr., went on to graduate from the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, while Hightower's mother became an educator, and taught at Lucretia Mott Elementary School in Washington, D.C.

African American elementary schools.

Howard University.

Education--Virginia--Fort Belvoir.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_002, TRT: 0:29:34
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Dennis Hightower's father, Marvin W. Hightower, joined the U.S. Post Office

Department after graduating from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., and eventually started a successful printing and advertising company. His mother, Anna Fowler Hightower, graduated from Miner Teachers College in Washington, D.C., and later became the assistant principal of Lucretia Mott Elementary School, where Hightower began his education. There, Hightower met Colonel Frederick Drew Gregory and educator Charlene Drew Jarvis. He attended Benjamin Banneker Junior High School, followed by the newly integrated McKinley Technical High School in Washington, D.C., where Charles E. Bish was the principal. During his senior year, he was nominated to the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School in West Point, New York, but could not accept due to age limitations. He went on to attend Howard University, and declined a second appointment at the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School during his junior year.

Education--Washington (D.C.)--History.

Segregation in education--Washington (D.C.).

Washington (D.C.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50
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Dennis Hightower matriculated at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1958, where he met student affairs administrator Carl Edwin Anderson. Hightower was captain of the crew and rifle teams as well as commander of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. He also pledged Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity with Pulitzer Prize winner Colbert I. King. As treasurer of the student council, Hightower helped to organize a debate between Malcolm X and Bayard Rustin on campus. During this time, Hightower worked with his father, Marvin W. Hightower, to meet the advertising and printing needs of the nearby colleges. Hightower met Denia Stukes Hightower at Howard University, and proposed to her on the day of his graduation in 1962. Soon after, he was drafted into the U.S. Army, and assigned to 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He remembers his college classmates including Howard University President H. Patrick Swygert, former U.S. Secretary of the Army Togo D. West, Jr. and investment manager Eddie C. Brown.

Swygert, H. Patrick.

West, Togo D.

Howard University--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_004, TRT: 0:29:57
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Dennis Hightower was recruited into the U.S. Army, and trained at the U.S. Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, Georgia. He then served in the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky before joining an intelligence operation during the Vietnam War. Upon his return to the United States, Hightower attended a job fair organized by Richard Clarke of Richard Clarke Associates in New York City. Afterward, Hightower resigned from the military against the advisement of his commanding officer, General William Westmoreland, and went to work for Xerox Corporation as the administrative assistant to the vice president of research and engineering. Within a year, he earned three promotions. Following an organizational planning seminar hosted by Harvard Business School, Hightower was inspired to pursue his M.B.A. He received a fellowship to attend Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts, where he was taught by Jay W. Lorsch, and his classmates included business executives Stanley O'Neal and Ann M. Fudge.

Harvard Business School.

Xerox Corporation--Employees.

United States--Armed Forces--Vocational guidance.

African American families--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_005, TRT: 0:29:48
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Dennis Hightower graduated from Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts in 1974. Then, he joined McKinsey and Company in Cleveland, Ohio as an associate, and was soon promoted to senior associate. In 1978, Hightower headed the operational planning for the Lighting Business Group at General Electric. He was mentored by CEO Jack Welch, who promoted him to vice president and general manager of their Mexico offices. In 1981, Hightower became the VP of corporate planning at Mattel, Inc. As the company began consolidating their assets, Hightower oversaw the sale of subsidiaries like Western Publishing Company, Inc. and Ringling Brothers Circus. Afterward, he worked as a partner at Russell Reynolds Associates, Inc. for three years. He then joined The Walt Disney Company in Burbank, California, and worked with President Frank Wells to expand Disney products and books to Eastern Europe and post-apartheid South Africa. He recalls meeting Bishop Desmond Tutu, and Nelson Mandela and Winnie Mandela.

Success in business.

Walt Disney Company--Employees.

Apartheid--Africa.

General Electric Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_006, TRT: 0:30:23
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Dennis Hightower met with various heads of state like King Juan Carlos I of Spain and Queen Margrethe II of Denmark while promoting The Walt Disney Company in Europe. In 1995, Hightower was promoted to president of Walt Disney Television and Telecommunications. In this role, he launched a Disney Channel in London, England, and orchestrated television deals in Hong Kong and Russia. He also sought to terminate the syndication of 'The Jerry Springer Show' and 'Roseanne' on Disney affiliated networks. Although he often disagreed with Michael Eisner's management style, Hightower was able to convince him to stop the re-release of 'Songs of the South' due to its stereotypical depiction of African Americans. Following his retirement in 1996, Hightower taught general management and Leadership, Values and Decision Making courses at Harvard Business School at the invitation of Dean Kim B. Clark. In 2000, he retired from teaching, and act as an advisor for Anthony Pilaro's satellite streaming company in Luxembourg.

Walt Disney Company--Employees.

Management.

Organizational effectiveness.

Harvard Business School--Faculty.

American Broadcasting Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Hightower, Section B2008_004_001_007, TRT: 0:08:02
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Dennis Hightower reflects upon his life and legacy; and shares a message to future generations.

Conduct of life.