

BIOGRAPHY

A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

Tuskegee Airmen Inc. Public Relations, P.O. Box 830060
Tuskegee, AL 36083

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN W. MOSLEY

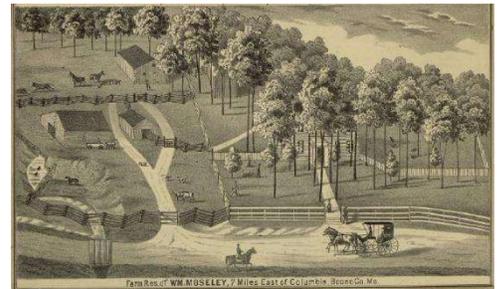


John W. Mosley, Jr., was born in 1921. He was raised in Denver, Colorado, and carved a path for himself during an era of repression and segregation. Fully aware of the challenges ahead, he pushed himself to excel in school and forged opportunities where there were few. His lifelong commitment to service over self, whether in the Armed Forces or civil service, is seen in the legacies he and his family have created in the Denver communities.

Mosley Family History: West from Missouri

John W. Mosley Jr. overcame adversity at every juncture of his life. His perseverance came from his father, John W. Mosley Sr., who was born enslaved and moved west to Colorado, looking for opportunity during the Silver Boom of the 1880s. Mosley Sr. found employment as a Pullman porter, one of the few good jobs available to Black workers during the era of Jim Crow laws (1877-1960s), which enforced racial segregation.

The Mosley family history traces back to 19th century Missouri when John A. Mosely and Cynthia Glasgow, started their own family. John and Cynthia, both enslaved in the early 1800s, likely lived and worked on farmland outside of Columbia in Boone County, Missouri. They would both take their enslavers' surnames after being freed at the end of the Civil War in 1865, though it is unknown when or if John and Cynthia officially wed. [The illustration at right is of the William Moseley farm outside of Columbia, MO, 1875. This is possibly the plantation where John Mosley Sr. was born enslaved. Source: The State Historical Society of Missouri]



The son of John and Cynthia Mosely, John W. Mosley Sr., was born around 1863. Historians struggle to determine an exact date since records rarely documented enslaved persons' births and deaths. Census records show that Mosley Sr. stayed close to his family in Missouri until sometime in the 1880s when he moved to Denver, Colorado. In Denver, he met and married Sarah M. Williams in April 1888, and appears to have had one child, Ruth, in 1889. Ruth's fate is unknown, as she doesn't appear in U.S. Census or Social Security records with other family members. With most 1890 U.S. Census records destroyed in a fire, she only appears in the 1900 census. [Missouri Pacific Railway advertisement, 1880. John Mosley Sr. would likely have seen advertisements like this as a young man. Source: Internet Archive]



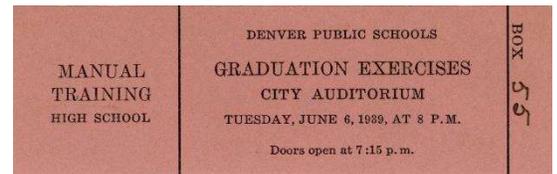
In 1906, Sarah Mosley died, leaving Mosley Sr. a widower. Two years later, he married Henrietta Young in Denver, and a few years later, they started a family together. Charlotte was born in 1914, Thelma came along in 1919, and John Jr. arrived in 1921. Another son was born to John Sr. and Henrietta's union, but he died before John Jr. was born. [At right is Henrietta Mosley with her children, Charlotte, Thelma and John Jr., late 1920s. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections]



Early life: Success amid segregation

By 1930, John Jr. lived on Marion Street in Denver with his family and attended Whittier Elementary. He went on to attend Cole Junior High and Manual Training High School. He was an accomplished athlete and academic

in high school, graduating as valedictorian in 1939. Segregation kept him from obtaining an athletics scholarship; however, he was awarded a National Merit Scholarship for his academic achievements and used it to attend Colorado State A&M (now Colorado State University) in Fort Collins. [At right is John Mosley Jr.'s high school graduation ticket, 1939. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections]



In college, John Mosley, Jr., continued to excel academically, athletically and socially. As a fullback and defensive guard, Mosley was the first Black player at Colorado State A&M since 1906 and the first to letter in the sport. [John Mosley Jr., seen here at left in his letterman jacket, was the first Black football player to letter in the sport at Colorado State A&M. Sources: Colorado State University Libraries and Denver Public Library Special Collections] Additionally, John Jr. was an undefeated college wrestler and the first Black wrestler to win a regional match for the school. He would have competed nationally, but racism and segregation prevented him from doing so in either



sport. Mosley was an honor student, sang in school theatrical performances, and further eroded racial boundaries by being elected class vice president in his junior and senior years. He graduated in 1943. [In the photo on the right is John Mosley Jr., seen accepting an award on stage resulting from a theatrical production performance during college. Source: Mosley Family Collection Fight in Order to Fight: The Road to Tuskegee]



During John Jr.'s time in college, World War II (1939-1945) was in full swing, and Mosley intended to fight for his country as a Pilot. He had high hopes of being the first Black student in Advanced ROTC at Colorado A&M but failed his physical at the Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver. Feeling this was inaccurate (after years of competing at the highest athletic levels), he took matters into his own hands. He paid for his own medical evaluation, which he easily passed, and took flight lessons, earning his private pilot license with the [Civilian Pilot Training Program](#).

Mosley returned to the draft board, ready to serve. With his sights set on joining the newly formed Black pilot program in Tuskegee, Alabama, he was confident his experience made him a qualified and competitive candidate. However, despite his training and qualifications, the military assigned him to a segregated artillery unit at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Perplexed, he and the Mosley family started a letter-writing campaign to local and national civic leaders and elected officials, their members of Congress and the White House, highlighting Mosley's flight skills, determination and character. Their efforts paid off, and in 1943, he received an assignment to Tuskegee. Recalling the experience, Mosley often said, "*I had to fight in order to fight!*"



The training program for pilots included three phases, and only those who completed all three earned the privilege of becoming Tuskegee Airmen Pilots. Mosley graduated on August 4, 1944, as part of the twin-engine (TE) class, which learned to pilot B-25 medium bombers as part of the 477th Bombardment Group. [TE-44-G Graduating Class, Source CAF Rise Above]



After graduation, Mosley was stationed at Douglas Army Airfield in Arizona for additional training and then moved to Godman Field near Fort Knox, Kentucky. Race relations in Kentucky, however, prompted the 477th to move to an Indiana base in April 1945.

At Freeman Field, Indiana, the racial tension overflowed. Black officers were denied entry to a Whites-only Officer's Club despite the Army's explicit integration rules. Indiana remained segregated, and commanding officer Colonel Robert Selway decided to uphold local laws instead of Army protocol. Mosley was in South Carolina for training at the time and returned to witness the aftermath.



Selway's act of defiance resulted in the group being moved back to Godman Field in Kentucky and more than 100 Tuskegee Airmen arrested. Only one person faced charges for jostling an officer, while the others were released. The Black service members refused to sign an agreement solidifying the segregation of officer clubs. Soon after, Mosley drafted a paper on his position about integrating the armed forces to be sent to the White House. It is unclear whether President Harry S. Truman read his paper, but Mosley felt his



efforts helped break down racial barriers in the newly formed Air Force in 1947. [In bottom right photo, John Jr. is in his B-25 medium bomber at Douglas Army Airfield, Arizona, 1944. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections. In photo at left is John Jr., back row center, with fellow Tuskegee Airmen. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections.]



Military and civil service

On January 12, 1945, Mosley married his high school sweetheart, Edna Wilson, while stationed in Indiana and, later that year, they welcomed their first of four children. Mosley was still training with the 477th in preparation for combat in the Pacific Theatre; however, the war ended before he could deploy. Disenchanted with the segregated military, Mosley left the Army Air Forces in 1946 and joined the Air Reserve as a commissioned officer. Being a reservist allowed him to pursue a master's degree in social work from the University of Denver, and in 1948, he graduated.

He and Edna made a life in Colorado and grew their family. John worked for the YMCA as a Young Adult Coordinator, which moved the family to Kansas City, Missouri, around 1950. While with the YMCA, he formed the "Swoop Club" [see photo at left] to foster young people's interest in aviation and other sciences [Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections] Later, when the family returned to Denver, he helped found the Denver Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. organization.



Throughout Mosley's long military career, he flew missions worldwide. When the United States entered the Korean War (1950-1954), the Air Force called Mosley back to active duty and he was stationed with the Central Air Defense Command in Kansas City. Soon after, in 1952, the Mosley family moved to Germany, where John was stationed with the 355th Troop Carrier Wing until 1956. Mosley later participated in missions between 1966 and 1967 in Korat, Thailand during the Vietnam War (1955-1975). According to his oral history interview, Mosley was also a pilot during the Berlin Airlift after World War II, however, it is unclear whether this was a separate stint in Germany or if time had conflated the two events.

After their time living and traveling around Europe, Mosley returned with his family to the United States, this time to North Carolina. There, he taught air science at North Carolina A&T University as an assistant professor until the family moved again, this time to Pasadena, California, in 1959. There, Mosley was the Director of Operations and Training for the U.S. Air Force Reserves Officers Training Center. [Edna and John Mosley at right with their children, Edna, John, Eric and Brian, mid-1960s. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections]



The Mosley family would make their fourth move in ten years in 1962, when Mosley was stationed at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas as a training officer. The following year he was promoted to Director of Operations and Curricula.

In 1965, he was assigned to Lowry Air Force Base, in Denver, and moved his family to neighboring Aurora, Colorado. After returning from Korat, Lt Col Mosley continued to serve as the Director of Operations and Training for the Rocky Mountain Region, U.S. Air Force Civil Air Patrol. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1970 as a Lieutenant Colonel and in 1998, Colorado State University inducted John Mosley, Jr. into CSU's Sports Hall of Fame.



The Mosley legacies

After military retirement, Lt Col (Retired) Mosley and Edna focused on issues important to them, such as Veterans affairs, housing, gender and racial equality. Mosley continued to serve his country as a civil servant and held positions as a special assistant to civil rights activist James Farmer with the Nixon administration, as an equal opportunity specialist for the Office of Civil Rights and as staff officer for the Department of Health and Human



Services. [Greensboro, North Carolina community members and John W. Mosley, standing 4th from left, pose for a photo at left with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, seated center, after King's speech at Bennet College in 1958. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections]

Like her husband, Edna was a trailblazer in her own right too. In 1991, she became the first Black Council member for the City of Aurora and was a founding member of the Women's Bank (purchased by Colorado Business Bank), which supported women's financial freedom from 1975 to 1995. As part of her vast and varied work, Edna championed the redevelopment of

Fitzsimons Army Hospital into the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Center. [Learn More about her Life: Edna Mosley Oral History Video, Denver Public Library.](#)

The robust activism of John and Edna Mosley has left a lasting legacy throughout the Denver area. In appreciation for their hard work, the community recognized them with a monetary gift in 2002. The Mosley's used the money to establish The John and Edna Mosley Scholarship Fund for Black college-bound students in Denver. John and Edna both received honorary doctorate degrees from Colorado State University in 2004. In 2007, Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Mosley and his fellow Tuskegee Airmen received the Congressional Gold Medal in Washington D.C. from President George W. Bush. [At right, Documented Original Tuskegee Airman Mosley can be seen speaking in 2007 about his Tuskegee Airman Experience at Metro State College, Denver, CO. Source: Denver Public Library Special Collections]. Following are additional accolades awarded John and Edna Mosley:



- 2009: John was inducted into the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame.
- 2011: Colorado State University at Fort Collins, created the John Mosley Student-Athlete Leadership Program (a mentorship program encouraging academic success among its student-athletes).
- 2015: the John and Edna Mosley P-8 School in Aurora, Colorado, opened in 2015 to serve elementary and middle school children.
- 2024: long after John Jr.'s induction into CSU's Sports Hall of Fame, and in an honor that is described as unprecedented, Mosley's college No. 14 Jersey was retired by CSU, from all university sports teams.

Edna and John Mosley, respectively, joined the Lonely Eagles Chapter on August 26, 2014, and May 22, 2015. John, Jr. was just shy of celebrating his 94th birthday. In 2021, Congress proposed a bill to dedicate the newly built VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Aurora, CO, after Lt Col Mosley. It was signed into law by President Joe Biden that November. The ribbon cutting was held on January 27, 2025, and on February 3, 2025, the Lieutenant Colonel John W. Mosley, Jr. VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic opened its doors to Veterans joining the robust network of the Eastern Colorado VA Healthcare System which serves over 100,000 Veterans.

[Veteran Biography of Lt. Col. John W. Mosley, Jr. \(PDF\)](#)

