

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rose Morgan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Morgan, Rose, 1912?-2008
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan,
Dates:	January 28, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:35:58).
Abstract:	Personal care entrepreneur and beautician Rose Morgan (1912 - 2008) owned and operated the largest African American beauty salon in the world beginning in 1942. In 1955, Rose Morgan's House of Beauty opened, and included a dressmaking department and charm school. Morgan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 28, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_009
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in Edward, Mississippi in 1912, Rose Meta Morgan grew up in Chicago. By 1942, she owned and operated the largest African American beauty parlor in the world. Following the business example of her father, industrious former sharecropper Chaptle Morgan, Morgan began making artificial flowers and convincing neighborhood children to sell them door-to-door at 10. Her skills with hair flowered into a business by age 14.

After attending Morris School of Beauty, Morgan rented a booth in a neighborhood salon and began working full-time. In 1938, she styled the hair of singer/actress Ethel Waters and impressed her so much that Morgan was invited to New York City as Waters' guest. Awed by the city's glamour, Morgan moved there and within six months had established enough customers to open her own beauty shop. Soon, she hired five stylists and signed a ten-year lease on a vacant, dilapidated mansion. By 1946, the Rose Meta House of Beauty had a staff of 29, including 20 hairstylists, three licensed masseurs, and a registered nurse.

Morgan opposed notions of beauty, which hold that kinky hair is bad, believing there is beauty in everyone. She began marketing her own line of cosmetics and staging fashion shows. With her ever-increasing success, Morgan bought a new building. In 1955, Rose Morgan's House of Beauty opened in a more stylish setting with a dressmaking department and a charm school in addition to the existing salon facilities. In the early 1960s, she added a wig salon. Over time, she employed and trained over 3,000 people.

In 1965, Morgan was one of the founders of New York's only black-owned commercial bank, the Freedom National Bank. She retired in the 1970s. Morgan continues to exercise every day and care for her health and beauty.

Contributions of Black Women to America, vol. 1. Kenday Press, 1982. Ebony Success Library, vol. 1. Johnson Publishing, p. 228. Notable Black American Women. Gale, 1992, p. 769.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rose Morgan was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 28, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Personal care entrepreneur and beautician Rose Morgan (1912 - 2008) owned and operated the largest African American beauty salon in the world beginning in 1942. In 1955, Rose Morgan's House of Beauty opened, and included a dressmaking department and charm school.

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:

Morgan, Rose, 1912?-2008

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Morgan, Rose, 1912?-2008--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Personal Care Entrepreneur

Beautician

HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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 Rose Morgan, January 28, 2002. 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 Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_001, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

Rose Morgan was born in 1912 in Edwards, Mississippi, the seventh of nine children to Winnie Morgan, nee Richardson, and Chaptle Morgan, both from

Edwards, Mississippi. As age ten, in 1922, she and her family moved to Chicago, Illinois, where she helped her family by selling cut flowers, working in a laundry, and styling hair beginning at age ten. She was very close to her father, Chaptle Morgan, and she describes his early encouragement of her styling career. Morgan recalls her early memories of her family and her community in Chicago, describing her neighborhood, her relationships with her family members, and her education at Willard Elementary School. She attended Morris Beauty Academy as a teenager before becoming licensed to style hair. After working at Coleia's Beauty Shop in Chicago, she moved with a friend, Oletha White, to pursue a career in New York in 1938, where she was introduced to Ethel Waters and began styling her hair.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_002, TRT: 0:30:22 ?

Rose Morgan moved with her friend Oletha White from Chicago, Illinois to New York to pursue her hair styling and beauty career. Her business grew through the 1930s and 1940s, attracting the attention of a celebrity clientele, which included Ethel Waters, Etta Moten Barnett, and Lena Horne. She started her business, Rose Meta House of Beauty, with partner Olivia Clarke Stanford, moving from a brownstone in the Sugar Hill area of Harlem, New York, to a three story salon in 1946, located at 401 West 148th Street, New York. Morgan developed techniques and treatments that innovated beauty trends for black hair care and style. As her business grew, she became well-known throughout New York's black community in the 1940s. She expanded her beauty salons into a successful and profitable business. In 1947, she opened a second location of Rose Meta House of Beauty, at 9 West 125th Street, New York, and then a third location in 1955 at 507 West 145th Street, New York. Despite the difficulties she faced as a black woman of securing funding for her expansion, she created a nationally known business.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Rose Morgan describes the creation process of techniques and treatments of styling black hair to remove natural oil and create a bouncy look that became extremely popular through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s; this helped her business expand so successfully. She opened Rose Meta House of Beauty at 401 West 148th Street, New York, in 1946, followed by a second location at 9 West 125th Street, New York, in 1947, then a third location at 507 West 145th Street, New York, in 1955. Morgan trained her employees in her creative styling techniques, and she developed a business style that managed hundreds of employees. She began to market a cosmetics line and hair products specific to her own style techniques at her salons at this time. Throughout the 1940s, her business continued to expand in New York, which included the production of fashion and hair shows. She developed relationships with her famous clientele, which included Sarah Vaughan, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, and Diahann Carroll. She formed a philosophy about beauty that "all hair was good hair".

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_004, TRT: 0:30:03 ?

Rose Morgan describes an average day running her salon in the 1940s, detailing the quality of service she provided to her clients as well as the way she managed a large number of employees; over her career, she managed three thousand employees. In 1955, bookkeepers she employed attempted to steal from her business. Her salons expanded throughout the 1940s and 1950s, opening up additional locations of Rose Meta House of Beauty in 1947 and 1955, and Morgan became well-known both in New York and nationally. The fashion and hair shows she produced at her salons helped her connect with other influential people in New York, including Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Adam Clayton Powell

Jr., and Bessie Buchanan. She developed a philosophy of beauty that “Being beautiful means thinking beautiful.” In the 1950s, her business continued to expand, despite the difficulties she experienced in securing funding as a black woman. In 1955, she met her future husband, Joe Louis on a trip to Las Vegas, Nevada.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_005, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Rose Morgan married boxer Joe Louis on Christmas day in 1955; she moved with him to Long Island, New York, and continued to run her business, opening up Rose Morgan House of Beauty at 507 West 145th Street, New York that year. In 1958, she annulled her marriage and continued to expand her business. Throughout the 1960s, Morgan’s business changed to meet the needs of shifting style trends, including the emerging Afro style. She also opened a successful wig shop. In 1965, with seven successful business partners, including William Hudgins, Frank Schiffman, Jack Blumstein, Sam Pierce, Bruce Llewellyn, and Jackie Robinson, Morgan opened Freedom National Bank, the only commercial bank for the black community in New York at the time. She also developed a relationship with Jacoby Dickens, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Seaway Bank at the same time. Morgan sold her main salon, Rose Meta House of Beauty, in 1973, and described traveling around the world, before entering into to real estate venture with her family. She reflects on the changing style trends for black women since her retirement and shares her thoughts on her successful business model.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_006, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Rose Morgan reflects on her business philosophy of philanthropy and training, as well as the changing beauty industry over her career. She also describes her thoughts on changing trends in black women’s beauty, noting the shifts since her retirement. Morgan describes how she managed such a large staff and business during her career at Rose Meta House of Beauty. After selling this business, she entered the business of real estate with her family members. She talks about her brother, Fred Morgan, the second black fire chief appointed in Chicago, Illinois. Fred Morgan and his son became the first simultaneous father and son district chiefs in the Chicago Fire Department. She reflects on her hopes for the black community, and her contribution as a businesswoman and style maker. Morgan describes her relationships with successful members of New York’s black community, like Percy Sutton and Mayor David Dinkins. She reflects on her legacy and wants to be remembered for helping her community. She is especially reflective on her relationship with her father and credits him for her success.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_007, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

Rose Morgan narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Rose Morgan, Section A2002_009_001_008, TRT: 0:07:09 ?

Rose Morgan narrates her photographs.