

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harry Porterfield

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Porterfield, Harry, 1928-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield,
Dates:	May 21, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:51:38).
Abstract:	Television personality Harry Porterfield (1928 -) created the television series, <i>Someone You Should Know</i> . Porterfield was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 21, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_090
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Harry William Porterfield was born on August 29, 1928 in Saginaw, Michigan to Viola and Harry, Sr. After moving to Chicago, Illinois in 1964, he has gone on to become one of Chicago's best-loved media personalities, known for his series, *Someone You Should Know*.

Porterfield graduated from Saginaw's Arthur Hill High School in 1946 and then received an A.S. from Bay City Junior College in Bay City, Michigan. Although he enrolled in the University of Michigan, his studies were interrupted after just one year. In 1951, Porterfield was drafted by the Army. He served less than two years in Germany and attained the rank of Sergeant. In 1954, he earned a B.S. in chemistry from Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti.

Porterfield began his broadcasting career in 1955 when he joined Saginaw's radio station WKNX as a jazz disc jockey. He worked as a continuity editor, as well as a cameraman and stagehand at WKNX-TV. In 1964, Porterfield became a news writer at Chicago CBS affiliate WBBM-TV Channel 2. Eventually, he co-anchored the WBBM-TV news and created the Emmy Award-winning shows *Channel Two: The People* and *Two on Two*. *Someone You Should Know*, his most popular series, aired in 1977 for the first time.

In 1985, Porterfield left WBBM and became a reporter for WLS-TV Channel 7, an ABC affiliate station in Chicago. He continues to produce the profile series *Someone You Should Know*. Porterfield has won numerous awards over the course of his television career, including 10 Emmy Awards, the Columbia DuPont Journalism Award, the Studs Terkel Award and the Operation PUSH Media Fairness Award. He is a member of the Jazz Institute of Chicago and plays violin in the Chicago Bar Association Orchestra-he earned a J.D. in 1993 from DePaul University School of Law. He and his wife, Marianita, have four children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harry Porterfield was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 21, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television personality Harry Porterfield (1928 -) created the television series, Someone You Should Know.

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:

Porterfield, Harry, 1928-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Porterfield, Harry, 1928---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Television Personality

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Harry Porterfield, May 21, 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 Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_001, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Harry Porterfield was born in 1928 in Saginaw, Michigan to Viola McKinley Porterfield, from Zion, Illinois, and Harry Porterfield, Sr., born in Ohio. His maternal grandfather was a Baptist Minister who raised Viola in a conservative household. Porterfield's "miner turned entrepreneur" paternal grandfather settled in Saginaw. His paternal family is related to the Hatfields of West Virginia, known from the legendary Hatfield and McCoy feud. Porterfield describes the fair skin of his paternal family, and how members of his family often 'passed' or were mistaken for white. His family did not identify as black, and growing up, Porterfield Jr. witnessed his father's racism against black people. Porterfield's earliest memory is attending the 1933 Chicago's World's Fair. He grew up in the industrial town of Saginaw, Michigan, home to five General Motors factories, in

an all-white neighborhood, and he describes his childhood as lonely because of this. He was an adventurous child, and started work at age nine.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_002, TRT: 0:31:21 ?

Harry Porterfield attended Fuerbringer Elementary School in Saginaw, Michigan, where he was the only black student. He encountered racism from teachers and students, though he remembers some teachers who encouraged him. He turned to singing, playing the violin, and listening to the radio as an outlet. He attended Arthur Hill High School in Saginaw, Michigan, graduating in 1946. Porterfield received his Associate's Degree from Bay City Junior College before enrolling in the University of Michigan for one year. With aspirations to become a doctor, rather than work in the automobile industry as was expected of black youth in Saginaw, Porterfield struggled with science classes, before dropping out. He was subsequently drafted into the U.S. Army in 1951, where he completed his basic training in Alabama. This was his first time in the South, and he describes the racism he witnessed. After serving in Germany, he was discharged and enrolled in Eastern Michigan University, graduating from there in 1954.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_003, TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Harry Porterfield graduated from Eastern Michigan University in 1954, and worked a number of jobs, including working at a General Motors' plant, and as a radio DJ at WKNX in Michigan, where he hosted a jazz radio show, 'Sounds from the Lounge'. During this time, he also wrote commercials and composed jingles. He describes visiting Idlewild, Michigan and the Paradise Club during the 1950s. He eventually was hired as a news writer at Chicago, Illinois CBS affiliate WBBM-TV Channel 2 in 1964. He was the only black writer at the time, and one of the few African Americans in Chicago broadcasting, which included broadcasters and HistoryMakers Daddy-O Daylie, Warner Saunders, and Herb Kent. He helped to produce the ten o'clock news and anchoring a weekend program for WBBM-TV. In 1972, he began anchoring the news, eight years after entering TV broadcasting.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_004, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Harry Porterfield began to anchor his own weekend news show on the CBS affiliate WBBM-TV Channel 2 in Chicago, Illinois in 1968, called the 'Saturday Noon News'. Throughout the 1970s, he continued producing news programming, and hosted the public affairs program 'Two on Two', before producing his most popular series 'Someone You Should Know' in 1977. Porterfield describes segments profiling interesting Chicagoans on 'Someone You Should Know'. Then, from 1979 to 1982, he co-anchored the Evening News at WBBM-TV Channel 2 with Bill Kurtis, before Kurtis left for New York. From 1982 to 1985, Porterfield then co-anchored with Don Craig. However, in 1985, Bill Kurtis returned to CBS Chicago, and the network forced Porterfield out of his anchor position to accommodate the return of Bill Kurtis. Although he got positive viewer feedback and 'Someone You Should Know' was popular, the CBS management demoted Porterfield back to weekend news anchor. Porterfield decided to leave CBS in 1985.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_005, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Harry Porterfield was demoted and forced out of his co-anchor position at the Evening News at the CBS affiliate WBBM-TV Channel 2 in Chicago, Illinois in 1985. Due to this unfair demotion, the black community, both in Chicago and nationally, led by the Rainbow PUSH Coalition headed by HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., protested and boycotted the station. This was covered by news outlets like the Chicago Tribune and Newsweek Magazine.

Porterfield understood that in Chicago, there was an audience invested in him and in having an African American to anchor the evening news, yet the CBS station refused to have Porterfield anchor, and the station soon lost ratings. Porterfield then moved to ABC Channel 7 in Chicago, where he continued to produce 'Someone You Should Know'. Then, he decided to attend law school, and he graduated from DePaul University's Law School in 1993. While in law school, he began performing in the Chicago Bar Association's orchestra.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Porterfield, Section A2002_090_001_006, TRT: 0:20:17 ?

Harry Porterfield reflects on his career, and talks about his hopes for the black community. Since Chicago, Illinois became his home in 1964, he has seen the city change and grow, and he describes the city as a place of opportunity for young people and for African Americans. Porterfield describes the number of successful black businesses and business leaders in Chicago, especially when compared to his upbringing in Saginaw, Michigan in the 1940s. He talks about his legacy and then narrates his photographs.