

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ofield Dukes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dukes, Ofield, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes,
Dates:	May 31, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:04:17).
Abstract:	Public relations chief executive and political consultant Ofield Dukes (1932 - 2011) founded the Ofield Dukes & Associates public relations firm in Washington D.C., and served on the White House staff during the Johnson administration. Dukes was also a communications consultant for every Democratic presidential campaign since 1972. Dukes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 31, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_112
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Public relations guru Ofield Dukes was born in Rutledge, Alabama, on August 8, 1932. After serving in the Army from 1952 to 1954, Dukes went on to Wayne State University in Detroit and graduated in 1958 with a degree in journalism.

After graduating, Dukes spent several years working at WCHB radio as the news director. In 1961, unable to get a job with any of the white-owned newspapers, Dukes went to work on *The Michigan Chronicle*. He found himself writing virtually all the articles, from editorials to politics, front-page news and music reviews. In 1964, Dukes won three awards for his writing from the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a Washington, D.C.-based organization of black-owned newspapers. Later that year, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed him deputy director of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity & Plans for Progress. The following year, he became the deputy director of public affairs for the White House Conference to Fulfill These Rights, where he stayed until 1969. In addition to this, he was appointed to Vice President Hubert Humphrey's staff in 1966 as an assistant. Following Johnson's decision not to seek reelection in 1968 and Humphrey's loss in his bid for the White House, Dukes became disillusioned. In 1969, he established Ofield Dukes & Associates, a Washington-based public relations firm, with Motown Records as his first client. Today, they serve Sony Music Entertainment, RJR Nabisco and the Congressional Black Caucus, among others.

Between 1972 and 1983, Dukes served as an adjunct professor of public relations at Howard University, and since 1993 he has served in the School of Communications at the American University in the same capacity. He has been a communications consultant for every Democratic presidential campaign since 1972 and helped organize the first Congressional Black Caucus dinner. He is also the founder of the Black Public Relations Society of Washington.

Dukes has won numerous awards over the years, including a Silver Anvil from the Public Relations Society of America in 1974 and a Gold Anvil in 2001. He has also been inducted into the Washington, D.C. Public Relations Society Hall of Fame.

Ofield Dukes passed away on December 7, 2011.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ofield Dukes was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 31, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Public relations chief executive and political consultant Ofield Dukes (1932 - 2011) founded the Ofield Dukes & Associates public relations firm in Washington D.C., and served on the White House staff during the Johnson administration. Dukes was also a communications consultant for every Democratic presidential campaign since 1972.

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:

Dukes, Ofield, 1932-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dukes, Ofield, 1932---Interviews

African American political consultants--Interviews

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Political Consultant

Public Relations Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Ofield Dukes, May 31, 2003. 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 Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_001, TRT: 0:30:25 ?

Ofield Dukes describes his upbringing. Dukes was born to Garfield and Violet Stringer Dukes on August 8, 1932 in Rutledge, Alabama. Dukes' parents were sharecroppers, and his earliest memory is of his mother dragging him along in the cotton fields while she sharecropped. Dukes attended grade school in a one room schoolhouse, where his teacher was strict. Dukes' aunt played basketball for Crenshaw County Training School, and he was often required to chaperone her during basketball games. Dukes also remembered watching his mother prepare his four sisters for church, and listening to Joe Louis on the radio. The smells of Dukes' childhood are of his mother and grandmother's cooking. As the only boy in a family of five children, Dukes spoiled. The Dukes family lived in a "hut" in the middle of a cotton field, near his grandparents. Garfield Dukes moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1937 to work for the Ford Motor Company, and sent for his family around 1940. The family lived in Detroit's Black Bottom community.

African American political consultants--Interviews.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_002, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

One of Ofield Dukes' elementary school teachers was Mrs. Barrow, the sister of Joe Louis. As a youth, Dukes delivered the "Detroit Times" in Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood. His customers were typically interested in numbers game results, Detroit Tigers coverage, or the comic pages. Dukes' neighbors also enjoyed listening to radio soap operas. In 1946, Dukes enrolled at Miller High School, where he managed the school basketball team and was influenced by Coach Will Robinson. Robinson was also the sports editor for the Detroit edition of the "Pittsburgh Courier," and hired Dukes as a cub high school sports reporter. Dukes also used his writing skills to woo a "harem" of women. He experienced his first heartbreak after one of these women broke up with him after he failed the Wayne State University entrance exam. After graduating from Miller High School in 1950, Dukes took a job as a janitor at Sears and Roebuck, and was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1951.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_003, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

In 1951, Ofield Dukes was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army and was stationed in Korea. Dukes left the U.S. Army in 1953, and enrolled at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, where he majored in journalism. Dukes also worked part-time as a sports writer for the Detroit edition of the "Pittsburgh Courier." In 1957, Dukes graduated with no job prospects, as few white newspapers hired blacks at that time. However, he was hired as the news director for WCHB-AM in 1958. In 1961, Dukes went to work as an assistant editor for the "Michigan Chronicle, where he won three National Newspaper Publishers Awards and covered the March on Washington. In 1961, Dukes founded the Young Adult Division of the Detroit Chapter of the NAACP. He served as the division's president, and led the group to advocate for equal employment opportunities for Detroit's African American community. Dukes became acquainted with the Gordy Family in the early 1960s. He also described black life and culture in Detroit during the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_004, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

As a youth, Ofield Dukes was an usher at Detroit's Paradise Theater, where he saw Billy Eckstine and Duke Ellington perform. Dukes also talked about Paradise Valley and the Idlewild, Michigan resort town. In 1964, attorney Hobart Taylor, Jr. secured Dukes a position as Deputy Director of President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity & Plans. Dukes did public relations work for the committee and worked to generate support for equal employment and affirmative action initiatives. Dukes watched as President Johnson met with corporate executives and civil rights leaders to gain support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Dukes often scheduled meetings between President Johnson, his cabinet members, and the black press. One such meeting led Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to start a military affirmative action program. Dukes admired President Johnson, and felt that his commitment to civil rights was obscured by the Vietnam War. In 1966, Dukes was hired to serve on Vice President Hubert Humphrey's staff.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_005, TRT: 0:29:47 ?

Ofield Dukes arranged President Lyndon B. Johnson's final meeting with the black press, during which he explained his commitment to fair housing. According to Dukes, of all the U.S. Presidents, President Johnson was the most committed to civil rights. Dukes also served on Vice President Hubert Humphrey's staff, and traveled with him during his 1968 presidential campaign. After Vice President Humphrey lost the election, Dukes opened Ofield Dukes & Associates, a public relations firm, in 1969. Soon thereafter, Esther Gordy Edwards hired Dukes to represent Motown. Though Motown was a well-known client, Dukes struggled with their inability to pay him on time. The stress of managing Ofield Dukes & Associates led Dukes to develop health issues in 1971. In 1974, Dukes was hired to produce three days of events for the inauguration of Coleman Young, Detroit's first African American Mayor, for which he won a Public Relations Society of America Silver Anvil Award.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_006, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

In the 1970s, Ofield Dukes allowed Alex Hayley to sublet office space from him while Hayley was writing "Roots". As Hayley struggled to complete the book, he stopped paying rent, and he and Dukes were threatened with a lawsuit. Once Hayley completed "Roots" the lawsuit was dropped, and he paid nearly \$2,000 in back rent. Dukes went on to represent Hayley, and learned that Hayley almost attempted to commit suicide as he struggled to complete "Roots." In the mid-1970s, Moe Septee, the producer of "Bubbling Brown Sugar," sought to hire Dukes for its Washington, D.C. tour. In order to be a theatrical press agent, Dukes had to be a member of the union. Vice President Hubert Humphrey referred Dukes to the leader of the AFL-CIO, who refused to accept Dukes as a member until he learned of Dukes' relationship to Humphrey. In the 1970s, Don King hired Dukes to clean up his image. Dukes also won an award for his planning of the celebration for the Washington Bullets' 1978 NBA Championship.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_007, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

In 1972, Ofield Dukes organized the first Congressional Black Caucus dinner. Then, in 1986, Dukes traveled to South Africa to represent Coretta Scott King on her visit to speak out against apartheid. King was criticized for her plan to meet with South African leader P.W. Botha, and Dukes wrote a letter to Botha to cancel the meeting. Botha did not acknowledge the letter, and accused King of standing him up on the world stage, one of Dukes' major public relations embarrassments. As a staff person for Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Dukes introduced him to Dr. Leon Sullivan, which resulted in federal funds for

Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Centers program. After the Howard University School of Communications was created, Dukes was hired to teach public relations. In 2001, Dukes was honored with the Public Relations Society of America's Golden Anvil Award. HistoryMaker Cathy Hughes also named a building at WCHB-FM in his honor. Dukes also described the evolution of the public relations field.

Video Oral History Interview with Ofield Dukes, Section A2003_112_001_008, TRT: 0:30:48 ?

Ofield Dukes' faith in God, integrity, ambition, and value of parenthood contributed to his success as a public relations executive. Dukes shared his hopes and concerns for the black community, as well. He is hopeful that younger generations will succeed since they received a "head start" from those in his generation. However, Dukes is concerned for the distractions that surround black youth, and their lack of discipline. Dukes closed the interview by reflecting upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He also narrates his photographs.