

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Blackwell, Robert D., 1937-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr.,
Dates:	December 9, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:18:30).
Abstract:	Corporate executive and technology entrepreneur Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. (1937 -) worked for IBM for many years before forming Blackwell Consulting with his son in 1992. Blackwell Consulting and their nationwide offices offer a range of IT services, generating revenues in excess of \$37 million per year. Blackwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_290
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive and technology entrepreneur Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. was born July 28, 1937, in Eastville, Virginia. He attended Rosemont Elementary near his boyhood home of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, a very wealthy community. Blackwell graduated from Radnor High School in 1955, and went on to Wichita State University on an athletic scholarship, where he played football with future NFL Rookie of the Year running back, Ted Dean. Forced by injuries to leave football, Blackwell came under the guidance of his math teacher, Ms. Fugate, and graduated with a B.A. in psychology in 1966.

In 1966, Blackwell went to work for IBM while the business computer industry was in its infancy. Beginning as a systems engineer, Blackwell was working as an IBM salesman by 1970. He left IBM for a brief period to work in public relations for the State of Kansas. Blackwell then returned to IBM; this time, as director of Greater Chicago Consulting Services. After serving as IBM's highest-ranking black executive, Blackwell left IBM in 1992 to form Blackwell Consulting with his son, Robert Blackwell, Jr. The younger Blackwell would later form his own entrepreneurial company, Electronic Knowledge Interchange. Based in Chicago, Blackwell Consulting and their nationwide offices offer a range of IT services, from web portal development to networking, messaging systems and workflow applications, generating revenues in excess of \$37 million per year.

Blackwell and his wife, Marjilee, live in the Chicago area. He is a board member of the *eta Creative Arts Foundation*, the Joel Hall Dancers and is a supporter of other non-profit arts organizations and community initiatives. He enjoys spending time with his six grandchildren.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate executive and technology entrepreneur Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. (1937 -) worked for IBM for many years before forming Blackwell Consulting with his son in 1992. Blackwell Consulting and their nationwide offices offer a range of IT services, generating revenues in excess of \$37 million per year.

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:

Blackwell, Robert D., 1937-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Blackwell, Robert D., 1937- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

International Business Machines Corporation

Occupations:

Technology Entrepreneur

Corporate 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 Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., December 9, 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 Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., Section A2003_290_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. was born on July 28, 1937 in Eastville, Virginia. His mother, Mary Ellen Blackwell, born on July 12, 1909 to Elnora Fitchet Satchell and Robert David Satchell in Eastville, Virginia, worked as a nursing assistant

and beautician. Robert David Satchell was a carpenter from Barbados who owned his own land and valued independence. Blackwell's father, Richard H. Blackwell, Sr., was born on January 1, 1904 in Beverly, New Jersey to Ida Blackwell and James Blackwell. He worked as a handyman, cook, and domestic in order to take care of his siblings. Blackwell grew up in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where there were only wealthy whites and working class African Americans, but no middle class. His mother was a devout Baptist who was also relentless about her children taking piano lessons and learning to read. Blackwell remembers his mother's opinions on the black power movement and how she discouraged her children from dating white women.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., Section A2003_290_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. grew up in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania and describes how his parents met while working at Bryn Mawr College. The collegiate atmosphere affected his parents' class mentalities. In fact, his father's willingness to take handyman jobs clashed with his maternal grandfather's notions of independence. Blackwell grew up during World War II, and remembers playing soldier with his four brothers in the gutters near his house and eating hot dogs for every meal. He also remembers the independence of walking a mile and a half to school each day from first through seventh grade. Blackwell attended Rosemont Elementary School in Rosemont, Pennsylvania, where he excelled in reading and in theater, and Radnor High School in Radnor, Pennsylvania, where he played baseball, basketball, and football. Both schools were predominately white and Blackwell remembers some of the racism he encountered from his classmates and on a trip to Delaware.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., Section A2003_290_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. attended Radnor High School in Radnor, Pennsylvania, where he played football as a center and a linebacker. After graduating from high school in 1955, Blackwell turned down a scholarship offer from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia to attend Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas. In college, Blackwell had his first experiences with Southern black life, including black high schools, segregated hotels, and middle-class black families. He also met HistoryMaker Ronald Walters and played football with Ted Dean. On July 29, 1959, Blackwell married Marjilee Blackwell. As a psychology major, he was offered a position as a systems engineer with IBM on the recommendation of one of his professors, Ms. Fugate, without ever having to interview. Blackwell received his B.A. degree in 1966 and worked for IBM in Wichita until 1971. From 1971 until 1973, Blackwell worked for the State of Kansas in Topeka, and in 1973 he returned to IBM and moved to Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., Section A2003_290_001_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. moved to Wheaton, Illinois outside of Chicago in 1973 while working with IBM. He reflects upon his desire to live in Chicago and to expose his children to Chicago's black community. However, he also wanted to provide them with a better education than they would receive on Chicago's South Side. Blackwell continued his successful career at IBM as a first line manager, second line manager, and finally a director before his retirement in 1992. After retiring, Blackwell created Blackwell Consulting Services with his son, Robert Blackwell, Jr., an entrepreneur who later left Blackwell Consulting to start EKI (Electronic Knowledge Interchange) and Killerspin. Blackwell

shares his hopes for his consulting firm and his philosophies on the importance of black-owned businesses. He talks about Blackwell's clients and its locations in Cincinnati, Ohio; Atlanta, Georgia; and Jackson, Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert D. Blackwell, Sr., Section A2003_290_001_005, TRT: 0:21:00 ?

Robert D. Blackwell, Sr. describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and the importance of black arts programs. He also shares his advice for younger African Americans in business. Blackwell ends the interview by reflecting on his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.