

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Lassiter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lassiter, John, 1937-2005
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John Lassiter,
Dates:	February 11, 2004 and January 20, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:56:22).
Abstract:	Financial counselor and insurance executive John Lassiter (1937 - 2005) was the CEO of Lassiter Enterprises. Lassiter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 11, 2004 and January 20, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_003
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Insurance executive and financial planner John Lassiter was born April 18, 1937, in Chicago, Illinois. Lassiter admired community businessmen and as a child wanted to be an actuary. Attending Betsy Ross Elementary School and graduating from Parker High School in 1954, Lassiter earned a B.S. degree in statistical economics from University of Illinois in 1959. He then went on to earn his CLU and ChFC degrees from American College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, in 1963 and 1969, respectively.

From 1959 to 1961, Lassiter worked as a statistician for the United States Department of Labor, and then served as a claims authorizer for the Social Security Administration from 1961 to 1963. Assisted by Benny Ross, Lassiter was one of the first African American executives hired by Prudential Insurance Company. In 1964 and 1965, Lassiter sold in excess of one million dollars of life insurance, and in 1968, he won the coveted Prudential President's Trophy for supervising the best sales force in the nation.

During the 1960s, Lassiter became active in CORE, the NAACP, Urban League, Operation Breadbasket and PUSH. He helped deliver tents and supplies to besieged civil rights workers in the South.

In 1984 Lassiter retired from Prudential and founded Lassiter Enterprises. He has obtained general agency contracts from most major insurance agencies including Prudential, Kemper, Travelers, and Guardian. Supported by certified public accountants, investment counselors, real estate advisors, attorneys, and risk managers, Lassiter marketed his financial services. On the boards of Trinity Hospital and Chicago Youth Centers, he also served on the presidential advisory committee of Chicago State University.

Mr. Lassiter died of prostate cancer on August 26, 2005; he was 68 years old. He leaves behind his wife, Rosielyn Lassiter.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John Lassiter was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 11, 2004 and January 20, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Financial counselor and insurance executive John Lassiter (1937 - 2005) was the CEO of Lassiter Enterprises.

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:

Lassiter, John, 1937-2005

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lassiter, John, 1937-2005 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Prudential Insurance Company of America.

Occupations:

Financial Counselor

Insurance 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 John Lassiter, February 11, 2004 and January 20, 2004. 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 John Lassiter, Section A2004_003_001_001, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

John Lassiter Jr. was born on April 18, 1937 in Chicago, Illinois. Lassiter's mother, Ethel Walker Lassiter, was born in Merrill, Arkansas. She left Arkansas in 1931 and became the first black secretary at the Cook County Department of Public Aid. Lassiter's father, John Lassiter Sr., was born in Tuskegee, Alabama

and moved to Chicago in 1934. Lassiter can trace his paternal family to North Carolina and recalls a story about his relatives' encounter with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the 1890s. Lassiter's father, eventually, became president and pension committee chairman of the local Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen union; he also exposed his sons to successful black businessmen and taught them about George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. Lassiter was raised on the South Side of Chicago where he attended Betsy Ross Elementary School and Parker High School. He often visited the Hall Branch Library where he learned about black history and listened to Joe Louis fights on the radio.

Video Oral History Interview with John Lassiter, Section A2004_003_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

John Lassiter earned money as a paperboy for the Chicago Defender to help finance his parents' dream of buying a home. He attended Parker High School, an integrated school with a mostly white student population, where he experienced a race riot. His mother fought to get him placed in college prep courses. Lassiter played sports and cultivated a close community of African American friends, including HistoryMaker Theresa Fambro Hooks. He graduated in 1954 and went to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he majored in statistical economics, but could not find work in the private sector after graduation due to racist hiring practices. Instead, he worked for several years at the Illinois Department of Public Aid and the U.S. Department of Labor. In 1963, his fraternity brother Benny Ross got Lassiter a sales job at Prudential Insurance Company. Lassiter was active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), working to provide food for people at Freedom Village and to bail Freedom Riders out of jail.

Video Oral History Interview with John Lassiter, Section A2004_003_001_003, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

John Lassiter was a member of Toastmasters International, where he refined his own public speaking and heard speeches from prominent Chicagoans. In 1963, Lassiter joined Prudential Insurance Company; he was promoted to a manager in 1966. In 1968, Lassiter's team had the highest sales total in the entire company. During the 1960s and 1970s, Lassiter was active in the Civil Rights Movement as a trainer for Freedom Riders and as the head of commercial sales for Operation PUSH, where he worked with HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson on the Family Affair gala at McCormick Place in Chicago, Illinois. Lassiter left Prudential in 1983, and founded The Financial Designs Group, where he worked as a consultant providing life insurance to business executives. His connections to black executives through Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity helped him build his business. Lassiter regrets he did not begin focusing his business on corporate executives sooner and expresses his admiration for HistoryMaker John Rogers, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with John Lassiter, Section A2004_003_001_004, TRT: 0:16:50 ?

John Lassiter had a life-changing experience in 1979, when he held an open, affirmative meeting with a corporate psychologist and several members of his team at Prudential Insurance Company, including HistoryMakers Bobby Rush, Ann Smith, and Thomas L. McLeary. The meeting focused on naming the strengths and potential of those present, and Lassiter credits it with helping him find the drive to leave Prudential and start his own company. Lassiter expresses his hopes and concerns for the future of the African American community. He also reflects upon his legacy and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with John Lassiter, Section A2004_003_002_005, TRT: 0:10:10 ?

John Lassiter narrates his photographs.