

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leonard Blackshear

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Blackshear, Leonard, 1943-2006
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear,
Dates:	August 27, 2004 and July 12, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:34:06).
Abstract:	Cultural heritage chief executive Leonard Blackshear (1943 - 2006) was the founder and CEO of Blackwell Consulting. In addition to his corporate activities, Blackshear founded and became president of Kunta Kinte Celebrations, and the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation. Blackshear was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 27, 2004 and July 12, 2004, in Annapolis, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_092
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Leonard Blackshear was born on June 29, 1943, in Savannah, Georgia. Blackshear's mother was a housewife and worked various part-time jobs in the healthcare industry; his father worked in electronics and later went on to become a teacher and counselor. At an early age the family moved from Savannah to New York where Blackshear attended elementary and junior high schools; he graduated from John Adams High School in 1959, where he was a member of the chess team and enjoyed poetry readings. Blackshear attended Hunter College in New York.

In the early 1960s, Blackshear joined Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, a nonprofit organization that provided youth programs for Harlem youngsters. He then went on to work in several odd jobs until he enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1964. While in the Air Force, Blackshear was trained as a guided missile technician in Denver, Colorado. While serving in the military in 1967, he helped organize and host the largest chess tournament in Europe. He left the military in 1968 and enrolled at the University of Maryland where he earned his B.S. degree in physics in 1970.

From 1970 to 1973, Blackshear worked as a systems engineer and marketing representative for International Business Machines (IBM). From 1973 through 1978, he worked for Anne Arundel County Economic Opportunity Commission while earning his MBA in finance from American University in 1975. In 1978, Blackshear was bitten by the entrepreneurial bug and started his own information technology firm, TeleSonic, where he continued serve as president throughout his career.

In 1985, Blackshear founded and became president of Kunta Kinte Celebrations, best known for summer Kunta Kinte festivals that attract thousands of tourists to Annapolis, Maryland, believed to be the port of arrival for the slave Kunta Kinte. He served in this post until 1992, when he founded and became president of the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation, which celebrated the words and messages of author, Alex Haley. In 1992, Blackshear

successfully secured support from the Annapolis City Council to build a memorial commemorating the actual arrival of an enslaved African to America; the memorial was completed in 2002, seen by an estimated one million people annually.

Blackshear also worked on an international project called the Lifeline Walk, a symbolic walk of forgiveness, where whites wear yokes and chains while blacks walk along side them. Annapolis was the first stop on the American tour of the walk, which began in September 2004.

Blackshear passed away on March 24, 2006, at the age of 62.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Leonard Blackshear was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 27, 2004 and July 12, 2004, in Annapolis, Maryland, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Cultural heritage chief executive Leonard Blackshear (1943 - 2006) was the founder and CEO of Blackwell Consulting. In addition to his corporate activities, Blackshear founded and became president of Kunta Kinte Celebrations, and the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation.

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:

Blackshear, Leonard, 1943-2006

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Blackshear, Leonard, 1943-2006--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

Community activists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Cultural Heritage Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Leonard Blackshear, August 27, 2004 and July 12, 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 Leonard Blackshear, Section A2004_092_002_001, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Leonard Blackshear was born on June 29, 1943 in Savannah, Georgia. His mother, Elsie Singfield Blackshear, who had Bahamian heritage, was born as Sarah Screven. She lived in an orphanage in Savannah after her parents died, until she was adopted by the Singfield family at age seven. Blackshear's father, Frank Blackshear, was born in New York City as the son of a railroad porter, was raised in Savannah by his godmother, and then returned to New York to pursue a career in radio electronics. Blackshear's brother discovered their father's family originated in Marianna, Florida. Blackshear often traveled to Savannah along with his parents and six siblings to see his maternal grandparents. He worked hard in school due to the high expectations set by his father, who provided sets of encyclopedias and classical music for his children. Blackshear grew up in a multiethnic community on Remington Street in Queens, New York where he remembers his sister playing the piano and painting the house during the holiday season.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section A2004_092_002_002, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Leonard Blackshear was a good student and a lieutenant crossing guard at P.S. 50 elementary school in Queens, New York. He then attended Edgar D. Shimer Junior High School where he was enrolled in the Special Progress program which allowed him to skip a grade. Blackshear attended Brooks Memorial Methodist Church and John Adams High School. During high school, he worked as a library page and then a department store stock boy, but was fired from both jobs. Blackshear and his siblings were forbidden to join gangs by their father; they managed to stay on good terms with all the local gangs, even after their father called the police about an illegal numbers operation. Blackshear graduated from high school in 1959, and attended the Bronx campus of Hunter College in New York. During his college years, he became heavily involved with Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU), which led him to drop out of college and move out of his parents' home. Through HARYOU he met Kenneth B. Clark and Malcolm X.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section A2004_092_002_003, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Leonard Blackshear attended Temple Number Seven in Harlem, New York and befriended Malcolm X, who gave him rides home; however, Blackshear never joined the Nation of Islam. After leaving his parents' home, he lived at the

Harlem branch of the YMCA. Blackshear lost his job at Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU) in 1963, and began working for a cosmetics firm, but was fired after approaching his bosses with an offer to purchase the company. He found a job in a management training program for Lerner Shops as a senior distributor, and became a foreman in the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. In 1964, he reported for his U.S. Military physical and chose to enlist in the U.S. Air Force, rather than be drafted. He was sent to training school in Denver, Colorado where he joined an interracial church and enrolled in computer courses at the University of Denver. He was later stationed in Bitburg, Germany where he continued his education in order to qualify to be an officer and joined a chess club.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section A2004_092_002_004, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Leonard Blackshear was stationed in Germany with the U.S. Air Force from 1966 to 1968. In 1968, he enrolled at the University of Maryland in College Park and graduated with a physics degree in 1970. He worked at the University of Maryland Data Center, then as a systems engineer and a marketing specialist at IBM, where he developed the corporation's Selectable Territory Analysis Report (STAR) system, which improved sales efficiency. From 1973 to 1978, Blackshear worked in community development for Anne Arundel County, Maryland, while he earned his M.B.A. degree from American University. In 1978, he launched his company, Associated Enterprise Development, which provided information systems for the technology sector, and joined the movement to put a plaque at City Dock in Annapolis, Maryland to honor Kunta Kinte, the ancestor of 'Roots' author Alex Haley. The plaque was laid in 1981. Haley frequently visited the city for the Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival and Commemoration, which Blackshear founded.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section A2004_092_002_005, TRT: 0:31:13 ?

Leonard Blackshear led the construction of the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Memorial in Annapolis, Maryland, which was completed in 2002 and consists of a statue of Alex Haley reading to young children, a story wall which relates the history of enslaved African Americans, and a compass rose that indicates directions to various countries of origin. In 2004, Blackshear worked to organize the Slavery Reconciliation Walk of Penitence and Forgiveness, which involves an event where whites walk in yokes and chains through a series of historical sites related to slavery. The event faced criticism from African Americans, who felt that it trivialized the brutal experiences of slavery. Blackshear has been involved in genealogy projects after the success of 'Roots,' including collaborations with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He reflects upon his legacy, his life, how he would like to be remembered and his plans for the future. Blackshear concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_001, TRT: 0:28:34 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_001E, TRT: 0:28:34 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_002, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_002E, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_003, TRT:

0:31:11 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_003E, TRT:
0:31:11 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_004, TRT:
0:30:11 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Blackshear, Section B2004_092_001_004E, TRT:
0:31:11 ?