

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alfred Liggins, III

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Liggins, Alfred, III, 1965-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Liggins, III,
Dates:	October 20, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:01:40).
Abstract:	Broadcast chief executive Alfred Liggins, III (1965 -) is the president and chief executive officer of Radio One. In 2004 he launched TV One, a cable network for African American adults. Liggins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 20, 2004, in Lanham, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_211
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Alfred Charles Liggins III was born on January 30, 1965, in Omaha, Nebraska. Liggins spent his early childhood in Omaha and at the age of seven moved to Washington, D.C. when his mother, radio mogul Cathy Hughes, took a job at Howard University. When he was sixteen, Liggins's mother and stepfather purchased AM radio station WOL. At first Liggins hosted a teen talk show on WOL, though he was more interested in the record industry than the radio business. In 1983, Liggins earned his high school diploma from Wilson High School in Washington.

After graduation, Liggins drove cross-country to California where he began working in direct mail advertising before landing a job in the record industry. From 1983 until 1984, Liggins worked in sales and management for Light Records and as a production coordinator for singer Patrick Anderson. After a job with Motown Records fell through, Liggins decided to move back to Washington, D.C. in 1985 to help his mother, who was by then divorced and running the fledgling radio station alone. Liggins attended night school at the University of the District of Columbia, and worked at the radio station during the day. From 1986 until 1994, Liggins worked in the sales department at WOL, quickly climbing from representative to sales manager, helping the station rise in ratings and into the black. At Liggins's urging the family business began to grow with the purchase of FM stations in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland, thus the beginning of the Radio One empire.

In 1994, Liggins took over the day-to-day operations of the family business, becoming the president and chief executive officer of Radio One, with his mother retaining ownership. In 1995, Liggins earned his MBA degree from the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. In 1999, under Liggins's leadership, Radio One went public and made history as the first female African American owned company on the stock exchange. In 2000, Radio One purchased twenty-one radio stations from Clear Channel, more than doubling the company's revenue. Radio One eventually became the nation's largest radio company, targeting African American and urban listeners with fifty-one stations in more than twenty cities.

In 2004, Liggins expanded Radio One's media sphere when he launched TV One, a cable network for African American adults. Liggins has been the recipient of numerous awards including Ernst and Young's Entrepreneur of the Year.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alfred Liggins, III was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on October 20, 2004, in Lanham, Maryland, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast chief executive Alfred Liggins, III (1965 -) is the president and chief executive officer of Radio One. In 2004 he launched TV One, a cable network for African American adults.

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:

Liggins, Alfred, III, 1965-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Liggins, Alfred, III, 1965---Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

African Americans in radio broadcasting--Interviews

African Americans in the mass media industry--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Chief Executive

Radio Station Owner

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|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 Alfred Liggins, III, October 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 Alfred Liggins, III, Section A2004_211_001_001, TRT: 0:30:40
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Alfred Liggins, III was born on January 30, 1965 in Omaha, Nebraska. His parents, HistoryMaker Cathy Hughes and Alfred Liggins, Jr., were also born and raised in Omaha. Liggins' maternal grandmother, HistoryMaker Helen Jones Woods, ran away from Piney Woods Country Life, the school her father founded for African Americans in Mississippi, to tour with her band, the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, which was the first integrated all-women's band in the U.S. Liggins first lived in the house his parents bought in North Omaha, a black neighborhood. His parents divorced and while his mother worked, Liggins was cared for by his paternal grandmother, Lucille Jacobs. She often took him to the local pool and her favorite taco place. At seven years old, he and his mother moved to Washington, D.C. and he attended Syphax School, Amidon Elementary and Alice Deal Junior High School. Liggins recalls his disinterest in school, his mother's friend who became a surrogate father, and being raised Catholic.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

African Americans in radio broadcasting--Interviews.

African Americans in the mass media industry--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Liggins, III, Section A2004_211_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20
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Alfred Liggins, III attended Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington, D.C. In 1980, Liggins' mother and stepfather, Dewey Hughes, bought WOL, a D.C. AM radio station. Liggins hosted a weekly show, but was uninterested in the radio business then. After attending St. John's College High School for two years, Liggins was sent to live with his father in Kansas City, Kansas. He soon left to stay with his maternal uncle and aunt in Houston, Texas. When he returned to D.C., he was unaware that WOL-AM was struggling. In 1983, Liggins graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School. A friend accompanied him on the drive out to Los Angeles, where Liggins planned to live with his stepfather, who had previously separated from Liggins' mother, and work in the record industry. He took night classes at the University of California, Los Angeles while working first as a direct mail ad salesman, then for Light Records and for a producer name Patrick Henderson. Meanwhile, his mother moved into the radio station to stay afloat.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Liggins, III, Section A2004_211_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00
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Alfred Liggins, III returned to Washington, D.C. from Los Angeles, California when he was twenty-one years old to work for his mother, HistoryMaker Cathy Hughes, at her radio station, WOL-AM. After three years selling advertising space for the station, Liggins was earning \$100,000. In the late 1980s, Hughes bought her first FM station, which played soft adult contemporary in contrast to WOL's black-oriented content. To sell the burgeoning company to advertisers,

Liggins billed the pair of stations as demographically suited for D.C. When the newly acquired FM station lost its audience, they decided to introduce a new format, urban adult contemporary. Liggins and his mother began to buy other stations in D.C. and Baltimore aided by their investors, HistoryMakers Terry Jones and Herbert P. Wilkins, Sr. Deregulation of the industry in the 1990s helped the company, Radio One, to flourish. Liggins earned his M.B.A. from Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1995.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Liggins, III, Section A2004_211_001_004, TRT: 0:30:40
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Alfred Liggins, III bought a radio station in Atlanta, Georgia in 1994, independently of Radio One, which he later sold to the company. He bought a competitor station, WKYS-FM in Washington, D.C., and he also acquired more stations in the Baltimore area. Liggins and his mother, HistoryMaker Cathy Hughes, each had their own financial stake in the Radio One and were interested in co-owning the majority. As such, they took the company public in 1999 to lessen their dependence on venture capital investors, who could make decisions about whether Radio One could buy or sell stations and other assets. In 2004, they launched TV One, a competitor to BET, with HistoryMaker Johnathan Rodgers as president and CEO. Liggins reflects upon having earned his M.B.A. from the Wharton School and offers his thoughts on the importance of college for young African Americans and entrepreneurs. He reflects upon his dream of entering the record business, his life, and his potential legacy.