

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Beasley

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Beasley, John, 1943-   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | October 8, 2007  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:49:03).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Actor, theater chief executive, and stage director John Beasley (1943 - ) appeared in several films and television shows, including the television series, 'Brewster Place,' in which he was cast alongside Oprah Winfrey, and the films, 'Rudy,' 'The Mighty Ducks,' 'The Apostle,' 'The General's Daughter,' and, 'The Operator.' Beasley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 8, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_285  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor and theater founder John Beasley was born on June 26, 1943, in North Omaha, Nebraska, to Grace Virginia, Triplett and John Wilfred Beasley. Beasley's neighbors included athletes Bob Gibson, Marlon Briscoe, Gale Sayers, Roger Sayers and Bob Boozer. Beasley's maternal grandfather invented the brick of chili for Cuttahee Packing House. His parents separated and his father, an electrical contractor, moved to Chicago, Illinois. Beasley grew up at 24th and Lake near the Ritz Theatre and the Hotel Callahan. Beasley played football and was popular at Omaha Technical High School. He attended the University of Omaha from 1964 to 1968.

Beasley moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and after starting in the mailroom of WFIL-TV, he became assistant producer for a local children's program called *The World Around Us*. Beasley worked on the waterfront, like Omaha's Marlon Brando did in the movie of the same name. A small part in Germantown Theatre's production of *As You Like It* started Beasley's acting itch. From time to time, he studied and took classes and completed an internship in Minnesota with Don Cheadle. Beasley was cast in August Wilson's early Goodman Theatre productions in Chicago; however, Beasley worked as a Union Pacific Railroad clerk for seven years before he decided to pursue acting as a full-time career. In his first year, Beasley's dream to become an actor came true when he was cast alongside Oprah Winfrey in the short lived television series *Brewster Place*, and his career took off from there. Beasley's other film and television credits include *The Apostle*, *Rudy*, *The General's Daughter*, *The Sum of All Fears* and *Everwood*.

Still living in his hometown of Omaha, Beasley enjoys teaching and directing at his newly established theater, The John Beasley Workshop at Center Stage. Beasley also keeps busy with junior golf and tennis programs and fundraisers for the American Heart Association. He and his wife have been married for over forty years and have two grown sons who are aspiring actors.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John Beasley was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 8, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actor, theater chief executive, and stage director John Beasley (1943 - ) appeared in several films and television shows, including the television series, 'Brewster Place,' in which he was cast alongside Oprah Winfrey, and the films, 'Rudy,' 'The Mighty Ducks,' 'The Apostle,' 'The General's Daughter,' and, 'The Operator.'

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# 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®.

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# 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.

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# Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Beasley, John, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Beasley, John, 1943- --Interviews

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African American actors--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

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Acting teachers--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

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## African American television personalities--Interviews

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### Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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### Occupations:

Actor

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Theater Chief Executive

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Stage Director

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|EntertainmentMakers

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## 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 Beasley, October 8, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:37 ?

John Beasley was born on June 26, 1943 in Omaha, Nebraska to Grace Triplett Beasley and John W. Beasley. His maternal great-grandmother was born in Alexandria, Louisiana; and, in the 1910s, migrated with her children to South Dakota, and then to Omaha. There, Beasley's maternal grandmother, Laura Collier Triplett, married Ward Triplett, who worked for the Cudahy Packing Company. He later co-owned the Ritz Cab Company, but lost his savings due to alcoholism. Beasley's mother was born in Omaha in 1923. Like most of her siblings, she did not finish school, and instead worked as a hairdresser. Beasley's father was born in Broken Bow, Nebraska, and had African American and Native American ancestry. After Beasley's parents married, his father worked as an electrician at the Kiewit Corporation, and owned a mechanic's garage in Omaha. His parents had five sons, of whom Beasley was the oldest. They separated when Beasley was young; and, from that time, he spent the summers with his father in Chicago, Illinois.

African American actors--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews.

Acting teachers--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews.

African American television personalities--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

John Beasley grew up on the north side of Omaha, Nebraska, near the African American commercial district on 24th Street. There, Beasley frequented the comic book stores and the Ritz Theater, and musicians James Brown and B.B. King often played at venues like the Dreamland Ballroom. As a child, Beasley watched 'The Howdy Doody Show' and the weekly boxing matches on television. In the fourth grade, he moved with his mother from his maternal grandparents' home to a housing development, where he enrolled at Howard Kennedy Elementary School. Beasley had difficulty in his classes, and aspired to be an entertainer. He joined a football team that included Gale Sayers and Marlin Briscoe, who both became professional players. Later, Beasley enlisted in the U.S. Army, and played football on the 24th Infantry Division team with Clarence Childs and Roy Shivers, who also played professionally. After delisting, Beasley obtained a football scholarship to Omaha University, where he was again teammates with Briscoe.

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

John Beasley attended Technical High School in Omaha, Nebraska, where he joined Coach Richard Christie's football team. The team competed against the rival Omaha Central High School and its star running back, Gale Sayers. Beasley also studied drawing, and starred in the play 'God's Trombones.' Upon graduating in 1961, Beasley joined the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Germany, and did not see action during the Vietnam War. He returned to Omaha in 1964, and enrolled at the University of Omaha, where he met his wife, Judy Beasley. Later, he became involved in local politics, and received death threats after holding a press conference to protest police brutality. He decided to move his family to his wife's hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he initially worked for WFIL-TV as a mail clerk, and then as an associate producer for 'The World Around Us.' Beasley also describes his record collection, which featured artists like Nancy Wilson and Sam Cooke.

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

John Beasley was an associate producer for 'The World Around Us,' a children's program at WFIL-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and debuted as an actor on the show's skits. He left WFIL-TV to become a union stevedore in Philadelphia, but continued acting, and made his stage debut with the Germantown Theatre Guild. In 1972, Beasley returned to Omaha, Nebraska with his family. He continued his theater training at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he studied with actor David Suchet. On Suchet's advice, Beasley went to New York City in 1975 to seek out an agent, but eventually discarded this plan to preserve his marriage. Instead, Beasley pursued acting in the Midwest. He was cast in Oprah Winfrey's 'Brewster Place' television series, and played the love interest of Winfrey's character. He continued acting on screen in films like 'The Mighty Ducks' and 'Untamed Heart,' as well as on stage at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

John Beasley played the role of Bynum in a production of 'Joe Turner's Come and Gone' at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Illinois. There, Beasley met casting director Jane Alderman, who secured roles for him in 'V.I. Warshawski,' and 'The Apostle' with actor Robert Duvall. On the set, Beasley and Duvall found they had similar approaches to acting, and developed a close friendship. After the success of 'The Apostle,' for which Duvall earned an Academy Award nomination, Beasley began acting in Los Angeles, California, where he appeared in the 'ATF' television pilot, and in films such as 'The General's Daughter' and 'The Sum of All Fears.' In 2002, Beasley joined the cast of 'Everwood,' a drama series filmed in Salt Lake City, Utah. This role raised Beasley's profile, and led to guest starring roles in network television shows like 'Boston Legal.' In 2002, Beasley founded the John Beasley Theater and Workshop in Omaha, Nebraska, where he produced plays like 'Fences' and 'A Raisin in the Sun.'

Video Oral History Interview with John Beasley, Section A2007\_285\_001\_006, TRT: 0:21:46 ?

John Beasley had a long career as an actor in Omaha, Nebraska, where he appeared at venues like the Omaha Community Playhouse. His favorite stage roles included Troy Maxson in 'Fences,' and Willy Loman in 'Death of a Salesman.' In Omaha, Beasley founded the John Beasley Theater and Workshop as a successor to the Center Stage Theater, an African American company that had dissolved. At the theater, he collaborated with his sons, Tyrone Beasley, who was the company's artistic director; and Michael Beasley, who went on to act in Hollywood films like 'The Great Debaters' and 'K-Ville.' Beasley also employed local actors such as Andre McGraw and Charles Galloway. He describes his plans for the future, including a film based on the life of National Football League quarterback Marlin Briscoe. Beasley reflects upon his life, legacy and family. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered.