

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Larry Huggins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Huggins, Larry, 1950-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins,
Dates:	February 4, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:25:46).
Abstract:	Construction entrepreneur Larry Huggins (1950 -) owns Riteway Construction Company founded in Chicago, Illinois. Riteway Construction Company was contracted to re-develop the Ida B. Well Housing Projects. Huggins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 4, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_007
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pioneering construction executive Larry Andrew Huggins was born on February 5, 1950 in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois to Mary Hightower. The second of four siblings, he graduated from Englewood High School in 1968 and continued his education at Washburne Trade School, where he got his painter's certificate in 1972.

Huggins began his career as a painter for the black-owned Brown's Drywall Company in 1975. His own company, Riteway Construction, began as Riteway Painting and Decorating in 1983, and with help from mentoring by larger firms and projects set aside in affirmative action programs, Huggins' company acquired several of the most pivotal construction projects of the time including the Harold Washington Library, the United Airlines terminal at O'Hare Airport and the Chicago Board of Trade building. Huggins' company, Riteway Construction, saw continued success in the 1990s and landed a joint deal as contractor for the Unicom Thermal Technologies, Inc., the \$6 million district cooling plant. Huggins was a founding member of Black Contractors United, which continues to support and pave the way for African Americans in the construction industry.

Huggins and Riteway Construction have committed to many projects on Chicago's West and South Sides. Riteway Construction continues to flourish as an award-winning construction service, obtaining major municipal, residential and commercial ventures each year, including the 2005 McCormick Place expansion and remodeling an apartment complex defaulted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1997. In 1997, Huggins became the first African American to sit on the board of Chicago's commuter rail system, Metra. In 2001, Riteway Construction was contracted on the ten-year re-development of the Ida B. Wells housing projects, which a team including Riteway Construction have worked to rebuild into market-rate, affordable housing for the Chicago Housing Authority.

Many of Huggins' numerous philanthropic efforts lead back to his childhood community in Chicago. He gives

scholarships to single-parent children and created a \$10,000 yearly scholarship at Englewood High School. Huggins is a continuous participant in the Chicago Public School's "Principal for a Day" Program. In 1996, he gave \$7,000 worth of toys to children in his old neighborhood of Englewood. Many organizations have recognized Huggins for his groundbreaking career and service to the Chicago community, including the *Chicago Defender*, the Chicago Urban League, the African American Contractors Association, Bank of America and the Chicago Economic Development Corporation. He is still a resident of Chicago and was honored by Englewood High School with the Larry Huggins Basketball Shootout.

Huggins was interviewed by *The Historymakers* on February 4, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Larry Huggins was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on February 4, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Construction entrepreneur Larry Huggins (1950 -) owns Riteway Construction Company founded in Chicago, Illinois. Ritway Construction Company was contracted to re-develop the Ida B. Well Housing Projects.

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:

Huggins, Larry, 1950-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Huggins, Larry, 1950- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Construction Entrepreneur

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 Larry Huggins, February 4, 2008. 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 Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Larry Huggins was born on February 5, 1950 in Atlanta, Georgia to Mary Hightower Huggins and Julian Huggins, Sr. His maternal grandmother, Ruby Hightower, had white ancestry. She married his maternal grandfather, Andrew Hightower, with whom she raised six children, including Huggins' mother, in Atlanta. Huggins' father was also born in Atlanta, where he worked for the U.S. Post Office Department. He met and married Huggins' mother when she was fourteen years old, and together they had five children. When Huggins was six years old, his parents divorced, and his father moved to Chicago, Illinois. Huggins' mother worked as a laundress, and raised Huggins and his three brothers with help from their paternal grandmother. Huggins also talks about his older sister, Betty Huggins, who died in a fire when he was an infant. Years later, Huggins developed a close relationship with his father, who worked for Huggins at the Riteway Huggins Construction Services, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_002, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Larry Huggins was raised by his aunt in Atlanta, Georgia, after his mother and older brothers moved to Chicago, Illinois. He began his education at Atlanta's Wesley Avenue School. At ten years old, he was involved in an altercation with another student, and was sent to live with his mother in the all-black Englewood neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. There, Huggins avoided gang activity by joining a baseball league at Ogden Park. He enrolled at Beale Elementary School, and went on to attend Englewood High School. While a student there, Huggins worked full time as salesperson at the O'Connor and Goldberg shoe store. He was influenced by his high school principal, Manford Byrd, Jr., and his African American history teacher, Juliet E.K. Walker, who challenged him to succeed academically. Huggins aspired to become a painter, and applied to the Washburne Trade School during his senior year. Huggins also remembers the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Larry Huggins enrolled in 1968 at the newly integrated Washburne Trade School in Chicago, Illinois, where he was one of ten African American students. He excelled in the painting program, through which he apprenticed for M. Ecker and Company and the American Company. Huggins graduated in 1971, and was hired as a journeyman painter by R.S. Bailey and Associates, Inc. He was then recruited to become a foreman at the R. Jack Construction Company, where he oversaw the construction of the Barbara Jean Wright Court Apartments. Three years after graduating, Huggins became self-employed. He obtained contracts with Corliss High School and the Chatham Park Village Cooperative, and maintained real estate mogul Dempsey J. Travis' apartment complexes. Later in 1974, Huggins partnered with his mentor, drywall contractor Murray Brown, to form Riteway Painting and Decorating, Inc. Their first client was the Chicago Public Schools, and they were later subcontracted to paint the River City and Presidential Towers apartments.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_004, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Larry Huggins' firm, Riteway Painting and Decorating, Inc., was subcontracted by the Latino-owned Gilbane Building Company to paint the newly renovated Terminal 3 at O'Hare International Airport in 1979. That year, Huggins became a founding member of the Black Contractors United (BCU) alongside black construction contractors like Glenn M. Harston, Taylor Cotton, Jr. and Charles F. Moore, Sr. The organization was created to advocate for black-owned businesses during the bidding for the City of Chicago's downtown construction

projects. With the BCU, Huggins raised awareness of the city's discrimination against minority contractors, and held fundraisers for black aldermen like Eugene Sawyer, William E. Shaw and John H. Stroger, Jr. The group also supported Harold Washington's mayoral campaign in 1983. After his election, Mayor Washington signed Executive Order 85-2, which required a percentage of city contracts to be awarded to minority firms. Huggins also talks about the conflicts among members of the BCU.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_005, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Larry Huggins' company, Riteway Painting and Decorating, Inc., was contracted in 1987 to paint the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. During the project, Huggins' work was repeatedly delayed by white architect Bertrand Goldberg, and by the Chicago Painters District Local 147 union, who objected to his all-black crew. Huggins recruited support from local black politicians like Eugene Sawyer, Gus Savage and John H. Stroger, Jr., and eventually received fair compensation for his work; but the initial delays ultimately bankrupted his company. Subsequently, Huggins was subcontracted by the Turner Construction Company to paint the AT&T Corporate Center. He later transitioned to general contracting with help from Gerald McCollam of Tribco Construction Services LLC, through whom Huggins' firm was subcontracted to work on the Harold Washington Library and the Chicago Board of Trade. Huggins also recalls the end of Chicago's minority business enterprise initiative under Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_006, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Larry Huggins partnered with the II in One Contractors, Inc. and African American contractor Paul J. King in the early 1990s. In 1991, they were subcontracted by the Walsh Construction Company to complete the concrete work for the McCormick Place convention center in Chicago, Illinois. Later that year, as the vice president of the Black Contractors United (BCU), Huggins endorsed Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Edgar's affirmative action policies. This decision led to conflicts within the BCU; and, in 1992, Huggins resigned the vice presidency. In 1995, Huggins' firm, Riteway Construction Services, Inc., and Latino general contractor Nelson Carlo were selected by Illinois State Senator William E. Shaw and Vice President John Hooker of the Commonwealth Edison Company to manage the construction of the Unicom Thermal Technologies project, which was then the largest minority joint contract in downtown Chicago. In 1997, Huggins became the first black member of the Metra board under Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Huggins, Section A2008_007_001_007, TRT: 0:27:04 ?

Larry Huggins founded the Christmas in Englewood Foundation in 1996. Under his leadership, the organization coordinated and funded an annual toy giveaway for low income families in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. In 1997, Huggins organized the first Chicago Football Classic in collaboration with President Michael Scott, Sr. of the Chicago Board of Education and businessmen Tim Rand and Everett Rand. Played between historically black colleges, the football game raised funds for scholarships and other educational initiatives. Huggins reflects upon his civic involvement in the Englewood community, as well as his career, life and legacy. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and shares his advice for future generations. Huggins concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.