

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lillian Lambert

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lambert, Lillian Lincoln, 1940-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert,
Dates:	February 9, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:29:32).
Abstract:	Entrepreneur Lillian Lambert (1940 -) was the first African American woman to graduate with her M.B.A. degree from Harvard Business School and went on to found her own company, Centennial One, Inc. Lambert was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 2012, in Richmond, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_018
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Entrepreneur Lillian Lincoln Lambert was born on May 12, 1940 in Ballsville, Virginia to Willie D. Hobson, a farmer and Arnetha B. Hobson, a school teacher and homemaker. Lambert graduated from Pocahontas High School in Powhatan, Virginia in 1958. Her mother, a college graduate, urged Lambert to pursue an advanced degree, but she wanted to move to New York City instead. She worked as a maid on Fifth Avenue, a typist at Macy's Department Store and a travelling saleswoman. Lambert then moved to Washington, D.C. in 1961, where she worked for the federal government as a typist in the Veteran Affairs Division and later with the Peace Corps while going to school at the District of Columbia Teacher's College (now the University of the District of Columbia). In 1962, Lambert enrolled as a full-time student at Howard University at the age of twenty-two. Under the mentorship of Professor H. Naylor Fitzhugh, she majored in Business Administration and applied to Harvard Business School. Lambert graduated from Howard University in 1966 with her B.A. degree in business administration and started Harvard Business School in 1967. At Harvard Business School, she worked with four other black students to increase the number of African American enrollments and in 1968, they founded the African American Student Union. Lambert graduated in 1969 and was the first African American woman to receive her M.B.A. degree from Harvard Business School.

Lambert was then hired at the Sterling Institute in Washington, D.C. and later as a manager at the National Bankers Association. In 1972, Lambert joined Ferris & Company as a stockbroker. In 1973, she began teaching at Bowie State College and became the executive vice president of Unified Services, a janitorial services company. Then in 1976, Lambert left Unified Services to start her own janitorial company, Centennial One, Inc. Starting in her garage, she grew Centennial into a business with more than 1,200 employees and \$20 million in sales. In 2001, Lambert sold her company and in 2002, she became president of LilCo Enterprises. She now serves as a coach, consultant and public speaker.

Lambert is the recipient of numerous awards including the Small Business Person of the Year for the State of

Maryland in 1981 and the Harvard Business School Alumni Achievement Award in 2003, the school's highest honor for its alumni. She has served on the board of visitors for Virginia Commonwealth University, the board of regents for the University System of Maryland, the board of directors for the African American Alumni Association of Harvard Business School and committee vice chair for the Manasota Chapter of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Lambert is married to John Anthony Lambert, Sr. and has two adult daughters, Darnetha and Tasha.

Lillian Lincoln Lambert was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 9, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lillian Lambert was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 9, 2012, in Richmond, Virginia, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Entrepreneur Lillian Lambert (1940 -) was the first African American woman to graduate with her M.B.A. degree from Harvard Business School and went on to found her own company, Centennial One, Inc.

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:

Lambert, Lillian Lincoln, 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Lambert, Lillian Lincoln, 1940- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 Lillian Lambert, February 9, 2012. 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 Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_001, TRT: 1:28:53 ?

Lillian Lambert was born on May 12, 1940 in Ballsville, Virginia. Lambert's mother, Arnetha Hobson, was born in Mowhemencho, Virginia in 1899. Hobson was raised on a farm with nine siblings. She attended Virginia State College for Negroes, what is now Virginia State University, a historically black university in Ettrick, Virginia where she trained as a teacher. Lambert's father, Willie Hobson, was born in Ballsville in 1892. He operated a store near Ballsville prior to Lambert's birth, but worked primarily as a farmer. In the summers, he worked in Riverhead, New York. Lambert describes how her parents met, lists her siblings, and describes their similarities to their parents. She tell of nearly being crushed by a falling tree as a child. Lambert also describes the sights, sounds, and smells of Ballsville and her childhood home. She attended Ballsville Elementary School and Pocahontas High School in Pocahontas, Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_002, TRT: 2:29:22 ?

Lillian Lambert describes her parents' attitudes toward formal education and finances. Lambert's mother was supportive of her education, but Lambert and her siblings spent much of their childhood on the family farm at their father's request, until she and one brother insisted upon going to school. Lambert describes her father as having been frugal and hesitant to pay for emergency expenses. Her mother worked for a family in Richmond, Virginia to pay for medical emergencies, including a tooth Lambert broke as a child. Lambert talks about her early education in Virginia, as well as her childhood church and race relations in Ballsville, Virginia during the 1940s and '50s. After high school, Lambert went to Riverhead, New York with her father and a brother, where she worked as a nanny. She moved to New York City where she worked at Macy's and later to Washington, D.C., working in the Veteran's Administration as a clerk typist.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_003, TRT: 3:31:08 ?

Lillian Lambert moved to Washington, D.C. in 1960 and began working at the Veterans Administration as a clerk typist. Lambert enrolled part-time at D.C. Teachers College and then, in 1962, she enrolled full-time at Howard University in Washington, D.C., four years after graduating from Pocahontas High School in 1958. Lambert funded her undergraduate education through scholarships, loans, and part-time work. She was mentored by H. Naylor Fitzhugh at Howard, one of the earliest African American graduates of the Harvard Business School and describes her undergraduate experience at Howard University as a nontraditional student where she earned her B.A. degree in 1966. Then, in 1967, she enrolled in the Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts, where she was the first and only black woman. Lambert campaigned with other black students for the recruitment of more black students to the school.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_004, TRT: 4:30:10 ?

Lillian Lambert talks about her efforts to increase black student enrollment at Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts. Lambert and two other black students met with the school's dean to demand an increase in black student recruitment. An African American Student Union was formed to support incoming students of color. Lambert reflects on Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968 and its possible effect on diversity at Harvard Business School, speculating that his death may have contributed to the school's increased diversity. Lambert talks about her professors at the business school as well as the case study method at Harvard Business School. She also describes a student project for American Express. Lambert became the first black woman to

receive her M.B.A. degree from Harvard Business School in 1969. Lambert went on to work for the Sterling Institute in Washington, D.C., then other businesses, including Ferris & Company as a stockbroker and Unified Services as a consultant.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_005, TRT: 5:28:59 ?

Lillian Lambert talks about her career. In the early 1970s, she worked as a professor at Bowie State University in Prince George's County, Maryland and as a consultant for Unified Services, a janitorial company in Washington, D.C. She joined Unified Services exclusively in 1972, where she was responsible for managing finances, employees, and negotiating with the IRS. In 1976, she started her own company, Centennial One, Inc., and was fired from Unified Services. Lambert was accepted into the Small Business Administration's 8(a) program, which was aimed at securing government contracts for minority-owned businesses. She talks about the political climate under which the Small Business Administration was formed. Lambert received contracts from Douglas Airport, the Naval Research Center, and others. She received the Small Business Person of the Year Award from Maryland in 1981. She recalls her mother's death in 1987, talks about difficulties in finding childcare, and reflects on her first and second marriages.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_006, TRT: 6:29:33 ?

Lillian Lambert describes her involvement with the African American Alumni Association at Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts. At the time of the interview, Lambert served as a board member. She also talks about her business, Centennial One, Inc., a commercial cleaning service she founded in 1976. She reflects on its success as well as the value of union contracts for employees. After selling the business in 2001, she founded LilCo, an umbrella company where she operated a tax franchise until the mid-2000s. She began living in Florida in the winters where she obtained her real estate license. In 2009, Lambert wrote her memoir, 'A Road to Somewhere Better'. She reflects over her life and the opportunities she has been afforded, as well as visits to her childhood home in Ballsville, Virginia. She talks about her interest in volunteer speaking engagements. At the time of the interview, Lambert was a member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in Sarasota, Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillian Lambert, Section A2012_018_001_007, TRT: 7:31:27 ?

Lillian Lambert describes those who she has mentored. Lillian describes serving on the board of regents at the University System of Maryland and Virginia Commonwealth University. She also recalls how she met her husband, John Lambert. Lambert reflects upon racism shown to President and HistoryMaker Barack Obama as well as how she has handled discrimination in her business dealings. She talks about her hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon her life, her legacy, and how she would like to be remembered. Lambert concludes by narrating her photographs.