

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth C. Frazier

PERSON

Frazier, Kenneth C., 1954-

Alternative Names: Kenneth C. Frazier;

Life Dates: December 17, 1954-

Place of Birth: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: Newtown, PA

Work: Kenilworth, NJ

Occupations: Lawyer; Corporate General Counsel; Pharmaceutical Executive

Biographical Note

Pharmaceutical executive, lawyer, and corporate general counsel Kenneth C. Frazier was born on December 17, 1954 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to janitor and former sharecropper Otis Tindley Frazier and homemaker Clara Elizabeth Frazier. The second of three children, Frazier grew up in the deeply impoverished neighborhood of North Philadelphia. Frazier's parents strongly encouraged education and hard work, ensuring that each of their children knew what it took to succeed. In 1966, when Frazier was twelve, his mother passed away, leaving Otis Frazier to raise three children alone. Frazier graduated from Northeast High School in Philadelphia before attending Pennsylvania State University. Upon completing his B.A. degree in 1975 with highest honors, Frazier enrolled at Harvard Law School, receiving his J.D. degree in 1978.

For the next fourteen years, Frazier worked as a lawyer and, eventually, partner at the Philadelphia law firm of Drinker, Biddle, & Reath. There he represented many corporate clients, including AlliedSignal and Merck & Co., Inc. However, the case which brought Frazier the most praise during this time was the pro bono work he contributed to freeing the innocent Willie "Bo" Cochran after twenty-one years on death row. Frazier accepted a position at Merck & Co., Inc in 1992. Frazier has served in various capacities at Merck, including general counsel, secretary, and vice president. During his tenure as general counsel, Frazier achieved great success in leading the company through more than 5,000 lawsuits regarding the alleged harmful effects of Vioxx.

In 2007, Frazier accepted the role of president of Merck & Co., Inc, and was given the additional roles of CEO and chairman in 2011, making him the first African American

to serve as CEO of a major pharmaceutical company. Frazier has served on the boards of several organizations, such as Exxon Mobil, Penn State University, and Cornerstone Christian Academy, a private charter school serving at-risk youth in Philadelphia, which he also co-founded. Due to his professional success and his position on the board of trustees, Frazier was selected to lead the investigation of the allegations against former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky and university officials. Frazier has received numerous awards, including the 2001 Penn State Alumni Fellow Award, the Association of Corporate Counsel's 2004 Excellence in Corporate Practice Award, and the Equal Justice Initiative's 2009 Equal Justice Champion award.

Frazier lives in Pennsylvania with his wife, Andréa, and their son, James. Their daughter, Lauren, is an engineer.

Frazier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 2, 2012.

Related Entries

M Hall Stanton Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Northeast High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

H.S. Diploma

Pennsylvania State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A. Political Science

Harvard Law School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

J.D.

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 20110101 to ?]

Chairman, President, and CEO

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1954 to ?]

President and CEO

Astra Merck Group [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1992 to 1994]

Vice President, General Counsel, & Secretary

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1994 to 1999]

Vice President, Public Affairs

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1997 to ?]

Added Assistant General Counsel, Corporate Staff to PA role

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1999 to 2006]

General Counsel

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 201005 to 20110101]

President

Merck & Co. [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 200708 to 201005]

President , Global Human Health

Drinker Biddle & Reath [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 197809 to 199205]

Partner

Cornerstone Christian Academy [MEMBEROf]

[from 1978 to ?]

Co-founder and Board Member

American Bar Association (ABA) [MEMBEROf]

[from 1978 to ?]

Member

Council on Foreign Relations [MEMBEROf]

[from 2001 to ?]

Member

Council of the American Law Institute [MEMBEROf]

[from 2003 to ?]

Member

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) [MEMBEROf]

[from 2011 to ?]

Board Member

Wiell-Cornell Medical College & Graduate School of Medical Sciences [MEMBEROf]

[from 2012 to ?]

Board of Overseers

American Academy of Arts and Sciences [MEMBEROf]

[from 2012 to ?]

Elected Member

Exxon Mobil [MEMBEROf]

[from 200905 to ?]

Board Member

Penn State University [MEMBEROF]
[from 200905 to ?]

Board Member