

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnny Shaw

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Shaw, Johnny W., 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw,
Dates:	April 23, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:43:01).
Abstract:	Radio station owner and state representative Johnny Shaw (1942 -) was the cofounder and CEO of Shaw Broadcasting Company, LLC, and owner of the WBOL and WOJG radio stations in Bolivar, Tennessee. He was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives in 2000. Shaw was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2014, in Nashville, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_060
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio station owner and state representative Johnny W. Shaw was born on January 5, 1942 in Laconia, Tennessee. He attended the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee, where he received a degree in theology.

In the 1960s, Shaw was the spokesman of a local gospel group's Sunday morning radio program on WBOL-AM in Bolivar, Tennessee, where he was also the first African American staff announcer. He was later promoted to program director and assistant manager, and then as general manager of WBOL. In addition to his work at WBOL, Shaw served as a minister at Saint John Missionary Baptist Church in Stanton, Tennessee. He also sang with the musical group, the Shaw Singers, and worked as a psychologist.

In 1987, Shaw and his wife, Opal, founded the Shaw Broadcasting Company, LLC, where he served as chief executive officer. That same year, Shaw Broadcasting Company purchased WBOL. In the early 1990's, Shaw acquired the license permit to construct a 6000 watt FM station in Bolivar, which was then built and began broadcasting in 1992 as WOJG-FM.

In 1997, Shaw was appointed as a co-commissioner of Hardeman County in Tennessee, where he served for one-and-a-half terms. In 2000, he was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives, representing District 80, where he became the first African American to serve in the state legislature in rural west Tennessee since reconstruction. Shaw won re-election in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. While in public office, he served as house member of the 102nd through 108th General Assemblies; member of the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee; member of the House State Government Committee and Subcommittee; member of the Joint Pensions and Insurance Committee; and chair of the Tennessee Legislative Black Caucus.

Shaw is a lifetime member of the NAACP, and has served as a board member of the National Civil Rights

Museum. He also served as board chair of the Western Mental Health Institute, and was a member of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority Board. In 2012, Shaw received the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters (TAB) Distinguished Service Award.

Shaw and his wife have six children. They reside in Bolivar, Tennessee.

Johnny Shaw was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 23, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Johnny Shaw was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 23, 2014, in Nashville, Tennessee, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Radio station owner and state representative Johnny Shaw (1942 -) was the cofounder and CEO of Shaw Broadcasting Company, LLC, and owner of the WBOL and WOJG radio stations in Bolivar, Tennessee. He was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives in 2000.

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:

Shaw, Johnny W., 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Shaw, Johnny W., 1942---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Station Owner

State Representative

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Johnny Shaw, April 23, 2014. 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 Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_001, TRT: 1:28:10 ?

Johnny Shaw was born on January 5, 1942 in Laconia, Tennessee to Wilner Jones Shaw and Wilson Shaw, Sr. His maternal grandparents, Emma Jones and John Wesley Jones, were sharecroppers in Fayette County, Tennessee, where his mother was born. She was educated through the fourth grade at the Love School. Shaw's father was born to Lizzy Shaw in Mississippi, and was brought to Tennessee as a slave when he was a baby. At this point, Shaw talks about the continuation of the illicit slave trade in the rural South during the 20th century. In Fayette County, Shaw's father was raised by a white farmer to work in the fields. He was later trained as a carpenter, and obtained a second grade education. Shaw's parents met and married in Fayette County, and raised eight children together. They worked as sharecroppers, farming corn and cotton. In 1960, when Shaw was eighteen years old, his father registered to vote, and his family was forced off the land in reprisal.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_002, TRT: 2:28:34 ?

Johnny Shaw was the youngest of eight children born to Wilner Jones Shaw and Wilson Shaw, Sr. in Laconia, Tennessee. He grew up listening to hosts like Bill "Hoss" Allen on WLAC Radio. Shaw began his education at the one-room Love School in Fayette County, where the students used secondhand books discarded from the white schools. After class, he worked the cotton fields alongside his father. Shaw continued his education at the segregated Fayette County Training School in Somerville, Tennessee, where he completed the ninth grade. In 1959, Shaw's family was forced off their farm by the white landowner in reprisal for registering to vote. They relocated to Vildo, Tennessee, where his father rented property from an African American landowner. Shaw enrolled at the all-black Allen-White School in Whiteville, Tennessee, where he joined the agricultural club. During Shaw's final year of high school, his father passed away. From that time, Shaw tended the crops at night, and went to school during the day.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_003, TRT: 3:29:44 ?

Johnny Shaw graduated from the Allen-White School in 1963, and married Opal Johnson Shaw shortly afterwards. He worked multiple jobs, including at Whiteville Auto Parts and Hardware, the Western State Psychiatric Hospital and Kilgore Flares Company, LLC. In the late 1960s, Shaw was hired at WBOL Radio. He was the first African American deejay in Hardeman County, Tennessee, and became known for his ad lib advertisements. He also experienced discrimination from local advertisers, who refused to have an African American host read their commercials. During this time, Shaw sang with his wife in a gospel group called The Shaw Singers. After several hit singles, The Shaw Singers released their first album, 'Yesterday and Today,' in 1976. The record sold sixty thousand copies. In 1980, Shaw began preaching at St. John Missionary Baptist Church, and enrolled at the American Baptist College. In 1987, he founded Shaw's Broadcasting, LLC and purchased the WBOL Radio station, which he changed to a gospel format.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_004, TRT: 4:28:55 ?

Johnny Shaw's broadcasting company, Shaw's Broadcasting, LLC, acquired the WBOL Radio AM station in Bolivar, Tennessee in 1987. The station featured a gospel format with music and preaching programs. He also partnered with WMC-TV in Memphis, Tennessee, and simultaneously broadcast their five o'clock evening news program. In 1992, Shaw launched an FM station called WOJG Radio, which featured a twenty-four hour gospel format. Under his

leadership, WOJG Radio became the third highest rated station in Jackson, Mississippi, competing with Clear Channel Communications, Inc. In 1997, Shaw was appointed as the commissioner of Hardeman County, Tennessee. He served in that role for over a year, and was then asked to run for a newly created seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives. Shaw was elected to represent District 80 in the Tennessee House of Representatives in 2000. He went on to secure funds to renovate the Western Mental Health Institute in Bolivar.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_005, TRT: 5:28:40 ?

Johnny Shaw represented District 80 in the Tennessee House of Representatives from 2000 to the time of the interview. In 2005, he selected his son, Tracy Shaw, as the new executive of Shaw's Broadcasting, LLC. Shaw continued to serve as a state representative, and became the chairman of the Tennessee Black Caucus of State Legislators. In this capacity, he was petitioned to allow white state representative Stacey Campfield to join the caucus. Shaw also became the first African American secretary of the Tennessee House Finance, Ways, and Means Committee. In 2012, he ran unsuccessfully for chairman of the Tennessee House Democratic Caucus. At this point in the interview, Shaw talks about political partisanship and the legislative debate over healthcare. He reflects upon his career, and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also recalls the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, and the closure of his wife's soul food restaurant, Opal's Family Restaurant, in 2012.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Shaw, Section A2014_060_001_006, TRT: 6:18:58 ?

Johnny Shaw talks about the separation of church and state, and describes the balance between his role as pastor of St. John Missionary Baptist Church in Stanton, Tennessee, and as a legislator in the Tennessee House of Representatives. Shaw also reflects upon his life and family, and describes how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.