

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Chaz Ebert

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Ebert, Chaz
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Chaz Ebert,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 7, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:30:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Lawyer Chaz Ebert (1952 - ) worked as a litigation attorney and served as vice president of the Ebert Company Ltd. Ebert was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 7, 2017, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_121
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer and entertainment manager Chaz Ebert was born on October 15, 1952 in Chicago, Illinois to Johnnie Hobbs Hammel and Wiley Hammel, Sr. She attended John M. Smyth Elementary School and Crane Technical High School in Chicago, Illinois and graduated in 1969. Ebert earned her B.A. degree in political science at the University of Dubuque in Dubuque, Iowa in 1972. She then received her M.A. degree in social science at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in Platteville, Wisconsin. Ebert went on to receive her J.D. degree from DePaul University College of Law in Chicago.

Ebert began her career in 1977 as a litigator for the Region Five office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. After three years, she left the agency to join the litigation department at the Chicago law firm of Bell Boyd and Lloyd LLP, where she focused on mergers and acquisitions and intellectual property. Ebert then began working at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Her work there focused primarily on race and age-based workplace discrimination. In 1989, she became the vice president of *Ebert Company Ltd.*, where she oversaw daily operations and provided legal counsel for the company. In 1992, she married film critic Roger Ebert and continued to play an important role in the company over the following two decades, and often traveled with her husband and his business partner, film critic Gene Siskel. When Siskel passed away in 1999, Ebert encouraged the partnership between her husband and Chicago Sun Times columnist Richard Roeper. In 2002, Ebert launched rogerebert.com, an online magazine of film reviews by Roger Ebert and other critics. After her husband's death in 2013, Ebert revamped the website under the company Ebert Digital. She also worked on the documentary of her late husband's life called *Life Itself*.

Ebert hosted the twelfth annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival in 2010. She led a team of critics to cover the Cannes Film Festival for rogerebert.com in 2013. Ebert also continued her husband's legacy through her published contributions on rogerebert.com.

Ebert has two children, Josibiah Smith and Sonia Evans.

Chaz Ebert was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 7, 2017.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Chaz Ebert was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 7, 2017, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Lawyer Chaz Ebert (1952 - ) worked as a litigation attorney and served as vice president of the Ebert Company Ltd.

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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:

Ebert, Chaz

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ebert, Chaz--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:

Lawyer

Entertainment Manager

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers|LawMakers

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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 Chaz Ebert, August 7, 2017. 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 Chaz Ebert, Section A2017\_121\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:37 ?

Chaz Ebert was born on October 15, 1952 in Chicago, Illinois to Johnnie Hobbs Hammel and Wiley Hammel, Sr. Her mother was born in 1914 in Thomaston, Georgia. A native of Talbotton, Georgia, Ebert's father and his sister, Emma Hammel, were reared by their father, Will Hammel, who worked as a preacher.

After marrying, Eberts' parents had their two eldest children, Carrie Hammel New and Johnnie Hammel, in Georgia before deciding to move to Chicago, Illinois in the 1930s. There, they went on to have seven more children: Martha Hammel, Wiley Hammel, Jr., Samuel Hammel, Adele Hammel Flowers, Steven Hammel and Donna Hammel. Even though Ebert was the second to youngest child, she had a precocious personality. She was primarily raised in the Little Italy neighborhood of Chicago, where the family resided in a four bedroom townhouse. She recalls a family visit to Thomaston, and talks about accompanying her father to a march for fair housing organized by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1966.

Video Oral History Interview with Chaz Ebert, Section A2017\_121\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:10 ?

Chaz Ebert's family originally lived on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, but a house fire forced them to relocate to the Little Italy neighborhood. Her father, Wiley Hammel, Sr., worked in the meat packing industry at Swift and Company, where he was a member of the union. In addition to her employment at R.R. Donnelley and Sons Company, Ebert's mother, Johnnie Hobbs Hammel, also served as a precinct captain in Chicago's 1st Ward. She also was actively involved in a local Friendship Club, and eventually became a Spiritualist minister. By six years old, Ebert was determined to become a lawyer. She attended John M. Smyth Elementary School, where she was inspired by her third grade teacher, civil rights activist James W. Compton. At Crane Technical High School, Ebert was the vice president of the National Honor Society, and a member of the drama club, pep club and Afro American club. Ebert describes her father's food preparation skills, and the philanthropic work done at her fortieth high school reunion.

Video Oral History Interview with Chaz Ebert, Section A2017\_121\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:19 ?

Chaz Ebert graduated from Crane Technical High School in 1969. Due to her high scores on the National Merit Scholarship Program's scholastic exams, she received many college offer letters. Ultimately, she decided to attend Dubuque University in Dubuque, Iowa, where she was one of the few African American students there. During this time, Ebert met her first husband Merle Smith, with whom she had two children, Josibiah Smith and Sonia Evans. In 1972, Ebert completed her bachelor's degree in political science, and began her graduate work at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. From there, she entered the DePaul University College of Law in Chicago, Illinois, where she developed an interest in litigation, and took on pro bono work cases at the nearby correctional facilities. In 1977, Ebert became an enforcement attorney with the Region Five office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). She went on to work for Bell Boyd and Lloyd LLP, before joining the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Video Oral History Interview with Chaz Ebert, Section A2017\_121\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:22 ?

Chaz Ebert left the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1980 to work at Bell Boyd and Lloyd LLP in Chicago, Illinois. There, she handled merger and acquisition cases as well as intellectual property lawsuits. After five years there, she considered moving to California to work as an entertainment lawyer, but chose to remain in Chicago due to her divorce proceedings with Merle Smith. Ebert then joined the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, where she worked primarily on age and racial discrimination cases. In 1989, she met Roger Ebert at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, and they became better acquainted at a group dinner later that evening. The two began dating shortly thereafter. In 1990, Roger Ebert hired her as the vice president of his company, Ebert Company Ltd., where she oversaw legal matters

and daily business operations. Ebert describes Roger Ebert's personality, and the beginning stages of their relationship.

Video Oral History Interview with Chaz Ebert, Section A2017\_121\_001\_005, TRT: 5:34:20 ?

Chaz Ebert became the vice president of the Ebert Company, Ltd. in 1990. She married Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert in 1992, despite his family's initial apprehension about their interracial relationship. From 1975 to 1999, Roger Ebert and his friend and rival at the Chicago Tribune, Gene Siskel, co-hosted several television programs on the PBS affiliate WTTW-TV in Chicago. They also appeared on television shows like the 'The Jay Leno Show' and 'The Today Show.' When Siskel died, Ebert suggested that her husband work with fellow Chicago Sun-Times columnist, Richard Roeper. In 2002, Ebert launched the online movie review magazine, rogerebert.com. During the 2000s, Roger Ebert underwent multiple cancer treatments and surgeries, which eventually left him unable to speak. Nevertheless, Ebert and her husband's connection grew stronger until his death in 2013. At this point, Ebert describes her husband's approach to watching films, the importance of charity and her views on remarrying.