

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Calvin "Kern" Grimes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Grimes, Calvin, 1940-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Calvin "Kern" Grimes,
Dates:	August 17, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	3 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:20:39).
Abstract:	Entrepreneur Calvin “Kern” Grimes (1940 - 2021) served as president of Grimes Oil Company, featured on Black Enterprise magazine’s list of top black-owned businesses. Grimes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 17, 2017, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_133
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Entrepreneur Calvin “Kern” Grimes was born on January 12, 1940, in Boston, Massachusetts, to Calvin Grimes, Sr., and Marguerite Grimes. The same year, his father founded Grimes Oil Company, which grew to become the largest and oldest minority-owned and operated oil company in New England. Grimes grew up in Roxbury and Dorchester, Massachusetts, and graduated from Brighton High School in 1958.

Upon graduating from high school, Grimes served in the National Guard at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and Fort Knox, Kentucky, before returning to Boston to work at his father’s business. In 1958, the company expanded to a second truck, which was driven by Grimes. In 1969, the company was incorporated as Grimes Oil Company, Inc., and Grimes, who had attended business school, assumed the role of president and chief executive officer. Throughout the following decade, he led the company’s transition from a residential gas supplier to supplying corporations that included the Polaroid Corporation and Raytheon Company. In 1979, Grimes Oil Company, Inc. reported \$30 million in sales. By 1988, Grimes Oil Company, Inc. had opened offices in New York City, Newark, San Francisco, and Miami. However, the company faced financial difficulties in the 1980s after two major clients failed to pay their debts, and Grimes negotiated a deal with its suppliers that allowed the company to continue to remain in business. In 1993, the company joined Intergy, Inc., a conglomeration that included Captree Chemicals and Aimtek Gas Company and invested in redevelopment projects in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

In 1979, Grimes Oil Company, Inc. appeared on *Black Enterprise*’s list of top black-owned businesses in the country and was ranked at number nine. The company was also named in 1989 on the magazine’s list of “Companies to Watch in the 1990s.” In addition to his career, Grimes was active with the Union Methodist Church, Prince Hall Mason, the Boys and Girls Club in Boston, and the Dimcock Community Health Center Foundation. The Grimes Oil Company also created a partnership with WGBH Boston in 1984 to fund programming for African Americans.

Grimes and his wife, Cheryl Grimes, had five children: Darlene M.C. Grimes, Lori B. Grimes, Kern Mitchell Grimes, Ashley Smallwood-Grimes, and C. Trevor Grimes.

Calvin “Kern” Grimes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 17, 2017.

Grimes passed away on December 26, 2021, at the age of 81.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Calvin "Kern" Grimes was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 17, 2017, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 3 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Entrepreneur Calvin “Kern” Grimes (1940 - 2021) served as president of Grimes Oil Company, featured on Black Enterprise magazine’s list of top black-owned businesses.

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:

Grimes, Calvin, 1940-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Grimes, Calvin, 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 Calvin "Kern" Grimes, August 17, 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).

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 Calvin "Kern" Grimes, Section A2017_133_001_001, TRT:

1:28:55 ?

Calvin "Kern" Grimes was born on January 12, 1940 in Boston, Massachusetts to Marguerite Perry Grimes and Calvin Grimes, Sr. His maternal grandmother, Margaret Perry, worked as a domestic for wealthy white families while raising four children. His maternal uncles went on to become successful musicians. Grimes' paternal family originated from Boston, where his father grew up in the South End neighborhood. He left school after the seventh grade, and sold newspapers before working for an ice supplier. In 1940, Grimes' father started his own fuel supplying company, Grimes Oil Company. In his early years, Grimes lived in Dorchester, and spent summers at Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. He first attended David A. Ellis Elementary School in Dorchester, and transferred to Henry L. Higginson Elementary School after the family's move to a predominately African American community in Roxbury. He then attended Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School. On Sundays, his family frequented the Peoples Baptist Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin "Kern" Grimes, Section A2017_133_001_002, TRT: 2:30:12 ?

Calvin "Kern" Grimes joined his father's business, Grimes Oil Company, after graduating from Brighton High School in the 1950s. The company, which was founded in 1940, initially supplied kerosene, wood and coal to local households, and later transitioned to liquid heating fuels. Grimes and his father, Calvin Grimes, Sr., operated the business on a small scale out of two trucks until they received their first commercial contract with Polaroid Corporation in 1969. At that point, the company became Grimes Oil Company, Inc. With further assistance from President Richard Nixon's 8(a) Business Development Program, Grimes was able secure contracts with governmental departments and larger commercial entities like Procter and Gamble Company and The Gillette Company. When a client was unable to pay their substantial debt, Grimes Oil Company declared bankruptcy. Nevertheless, they continued operations with the aid of their supplier, Global Petroleum. In 1991, Grimes' father died from a stroke at seventy-five years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin "Kern" Grimes, Section A2017_133_001_003, TRT: 3:21:32 ?

Calvin "Kern" Grimes was the president of Grimes Oil Company, as the corporation entered a joint venture with Captree Chemical Corporation and Aimtek, Inc. in 1993. Over the years, Grimes joined a variety of organizations on a local and regional level, including Martha's Vineyard Branch NAACP, the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials and the Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council. At this point in the interview, Grimes describes his friendship with Minister Louis Farrakhan, his company's current contracts with the Massachusetts Port Authority, Boston University as well as Avis Budget Group, Inc. and The Hertz Corporation. Grimes also describes the importance of minority set aside programs, the accomplishments of young African American professionals, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community at large. Grimes concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life and legacy.