

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Chester C. Owens, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Owens, Chester C., 1933-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr.,
Dates:	November 5, 2019
Bulk Dates:	2019
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:57:11).
Abstract:	Entrepreneur and city council member Chester Owens, Jr. (1933-) was chairman of the Kansas City, Kansas NAACP's Labor and Industry Committee from 1960 to 1963, the first African American elected to Kansas City government in the 20th century in 1983, and owner and president of the insurance company, H.W. Sewing and Co., from 1976 to 1998. Owens was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 5, 2019, in Kansas City, Kansas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2019_121
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Entrepreneur and city council member Chester Owens, Jr. was born on April 9, 1933 in Ashdown Arkansas to Francis and Chester Owens, Sr. The family moved to Kansas City, Kansas in 1946 where Owens graduated from Sumner High School in 1949. He then attended Sumner Junior College until 1951 when he joined the United States Air Force and was deployed to Japan. Owens was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant in 1955, and subsequently completed his B.S. degree in business administration at Pittsburg State University in Pittsburg, Kansas, graduating from there in 1958.

In 1959, Owens was hired as an underwriter and salesman at the insurance agency H.W. Sewing & Co. in Kansas City, Kansas. He worked here until 1961 when he joined General Motors. After one year, Owens returned to H.W. Sewing & Co. as an underwriter and salesman. In the early 1960s, he worked with the Northwest District Citizens Committee and the NAACP to desegregate the downtown shopping district. As chairman of the NAACP's Labor and Industry Committee from 1960 to 1963, Owens and his late wife, Lillie Anne, wrote letters to local business owners and organized pickets of stores refusing to hire African Americans. In 1976, Owens bought H.W. Sewing and Co. from the founder, Henry Warren Sewing, and served as president of the agency. In 1983, he was elected to the City Council of Kansas City, Kansas, making him the first African American elected to Kansas City government in the 20th century. He served two terms on the council, during which time he also briefly served as deputy mayor in 1984. Owens retired as president of H.W. Sewing and Co. in 1998.

Owens has also served on numerous boards, including for Douglass State Bank, United Way of Wyandotte County, Kansas, and the Kansas Association of Independent Insurance Agents, and as president of the Northeast Business Association, Struggler's Hill/Roots Neighborhood Association, Kansas City, Kansas Association of Independent Insurance Agents, Homeowner's Task Force for the State of Kansas, the Economic Opportunity Foundation, and Sumner High School Alumni Association. He is also a member of Sigma Pi Phi and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternities.

Owens is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Kansas City, Kansas Leadership Award in 1989, of which he was the first ever recipient; being named amongst the Kansas City Globe's One Hundred Most Influential Citizens in 1990; the 2012 Outstanding Leadership Award presented by the Kansas House of Representatives; being named in the Kansas City, Kansas USD 500's 2012 Reasons to Believe; the NAACP Civil Rights Award; and the Friends of Yates' Black Man of Distinction Award. Owens has also been honored through the naming of the Chester C. Owens Sumner Alumni Room and The Chester Owens Jr. Construction Skills Training Center, which houses a U.S. Department of Labor-run program called YouthBuild, both named in 2011.

Chester Owens, Jr. resides in Kansas City, Kansas and has three daughters and two grandsons.

Chester Owens, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 5, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 5, 2019, in Kansas City, Kansas, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Entrepreneur and city council member Chester Owens, Jr. (1933-) was chairman of the Kansas City, Kansas NAACP's Labor and Industry Committee from 1960 to 1963, the first African American elected to Kansas City government in the 20th century in 1983, and owner and president of the insurance company, H.W. Sewing and Co., from 1976 to 1998.

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:

Owens, Chester C., 1933-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Owens, Chester C., 1933---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Entrepreneur

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|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 Chester C. Owens, Jr., November 5, 2019. 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 Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_001, TRT: 1:29:42 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_002, TRT: 2:28:59 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_003, TRT: 3:29:01 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_004, TRT: 4:30:21 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_005, TRT: 5:31:05 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_006, TRT: 6:30:33 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_007, TRT: 7:32:42 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Chester C. Owens, Jr., Section A2019_121_001_008, TRT: 8:24:48 ?