

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Eugene Morris

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Morris, Eugene, 1939-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris,
Dates:	February 1, 2006 and January 24, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:12:14).
Abstract:	Advertising chief executive and advertising executive Eugene Morris (1939 -) owns his own advertising company called Eugene Morris Communications (EMC). Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 1, 2006 and January 24, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_006
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pioneering advertising executive Eugene Morris, Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois on July 25, 1939. The youngest of four siblings, Morris was raised in Chicago's historic Bronzeville neighborhood. Owning several restaurants, Morris' parents, Eugene Morris, Sr. and Willie Mae Morris, instilled an entrepreneurial spirit in their son. At the age of twelve, Morris and a childhood friend started a junk resale business with local thrift and resale shops as their clients. In 1952, Morris graduated from Forestville Elementary School. He then attended Tilden High School, graduating in 1956.

Morris attended several community colleges, and was later drafted into the U.S. Army in 1962. He was stationed in Kentucky at Fort Knox, in South Carolina at Fort Jackson, and overseas in Germany. By 1968, Morris returned to Chicago and obtained a job with the advertising agency of Foote, Cone, and Belding. He worked for several years at Foote, Cone, and Belding while attending Roosevelt University. In 1969, he received his B.A. degree in business administration and his M.B.A in 1971 from Roosevelt University. During the period between 1974 and 1986, Morris worked as an account supervisor and senior vice president management supervisor at Burrell Advertising Agency. He developed advertising programs for clients including Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Johnson Products.

In 1987, Morris founded his own advertising agency entitled Eugene Morris Communications, Inc. (EMC). EMC has been ranked as one of Black Enterprise's top fifteen advertising agencies. EMC's clientele have included American Family Insurance, Tyson Foods, Illinois Department of Transportation, and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. EMC has created major multi-cultural and multi-dimensional advertising campaigns that have generated \$37.7 million in billings. Morris received the 2005 Martin Luther King Legacy Award from the Martin Luther King Boys and Girls Club for his philanthropic efforts. He has also received the 2006 Illinois Governor's Small Business Person of the Year Award.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Eugene Morris was conducted by Tracey Lewis on February 1, 2006 and January 24, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Advertising chief executive and advertising executive Eugene Morris (1939 -) owns his own advertising company called Eugene Morris Communications (EMC).

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:

Morris, Eugene, 1939-

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Morris, Eugene, 1939- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Advertising Chief Executive

Advertising Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Eugene Morris, February 1, 2006 and January 24, 2006. 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 Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_001, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Eugene Morris was born on July 25, 1939 in Chicago, Illinois to Willie Mae Mitchell Morris and Eugene Morris, Sr. His mother was born on September 5, 1903 in Athens, Texas to Birder McQueen and J.B. McQueen. Morris' father was born on May 26, 1902 in Denison, Texas to Evelyn Morris. Morris' older sisters were Mary Lawrence, Ora Jeffries, and Doris Porter, and all three were

born in Dallas, Texas. Morris' stepsister, Mary Tyler, was also born in Dallas, and stayed there when the rest of the family moved to Chicago, Illinois around 1936. Morris grew up in different neighborhoods in Chicago, including the Near South Side, the Near North Side, and the South Side. He attended James A. Sexton Elementary School until fourth grade, Forestville Elementary School, and Tilden Career Community Academy High School in Chicago, Illinois. Morris fondly remembers his sixth grade teacher, HistoryMaker Frances T. Matlock, and recalls meeting her again as a successful adult.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Eugene Morris recalls collecting scrap metal on a rented horse and buggy with a friend when he was twelve to raise money. He attended Tilden Career Community Academy High School in Chicago, Illinois, an integrated school with many poor white students. Morris recalls the segregated school stores and the fights he would get into because of racism. He also earned a school letter for wrestling and excelled in his shop class, but did not apply himself to his studies until his last year. Morris' father owned multiple restaurants around Chicago, including Toppers Inn (ph.). After graduating from high school in 1956, Morris worked at the post office and attended classes at Wilson Junior College and Olive-Harvey College, both part of the City Colleges of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. In 1962, Morris was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was stationed at Fort Knox in Kentucky and Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina before being sent to Germany, where he worked as a company clerk.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Eugene Morris recalls his parents' cooking during his childhood and his mother's faith. Between 1962 and 1965, Morris enlisted in the U.S. Army and was stationed at Coleman Barracks in Sandhofen, Germany, where he worked as a company clerk. He recalls the power that the position granted him, the money that he was able to earn by lending money on the base, and his travel in Europe. In 1965, Morris returned to Chicago, Illinois and enrolled at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois to study business administration. In 1968, Morris received an internship at the advertising firm of Foote, Cone and Belding in Chicago. After receiving his B.A. degree in 1969, Morris returned to work at Foote, Cone and Belding in media research. While working there, Morris also pursued his M.B.A. at Roosevelt University, which he received in 1971. Morris recalls his experience balancing school, work, and his social life.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Eugene Morris recalls where he was during the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as his experience in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. In 1965, after returning to Chicago, Illinois from Germany, Morris had his car stolen twice. This resulted in his decision to drive an Oldsmobile, who would later become a major client. Morris worked at the firm of Foote, Cone and Belding from 1968 until 1974, where he became their first black account executive. He recalls the racism he experienced including being asked to impersonate HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson to accompany one of the executives to an event. In 1974, Morris joined HistoryMaker Thomas J. Burrell at Burrell Advertising, where he was account supervisor and also worked as a media director. At Burrell, Morris worked on the McDonalds and Coca Cola accounts and describes how they changed their ad campaigns to target the African American market.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Eugene Morris worked at Burrell Advertising from 1974 until 1986, where he

worked on accounts with McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Canadian Mist. He reflects on why general market campaigns were not effective for the African American market. In 1986, Morris left Burrell Advertising; and, in 1987, started his own advertising agency with Joey Randall named Morris Randall. Later in 1987, the agency became E. Morris Communications, Inc. Morris reflects on his father's death in 1971 and his mother's death in 1985. At E. Morris Communications, Morris had accounts with brands like Jack Daniel's, Southern Comfort, Brown-Forman Corporation, Carnation, Kool-Aid, Oldsmobile, and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. Morris shares his concept of total marketing, and reflects on the quick rollover of the advertising business. In 2001, Morris' biggest client, Oldsmobile, folded and caused him to lay off half of his staff. Morris recalls how he turned the company around by focusing on their existing clients.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_001_006, TRT: 0:27:20 ?

Eugene Morris began working on advertising campaigns for Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. around 1992, and worked with them to tell African American stories like the Buffalo Soldiers and the Gullah/Geechee Nation. He also describes his work with the Illinois Department of Transportation and the reconstruction of the Dan Ryan Expressway and with Tyson Foods, Inc., where he created the popular "Double Dutch" advertising campaign. Morris describes his approach to marketing to the African American community with a focus on subdividing the African American market into subgroups. In 2005, Morris founded the Association of Black-Owned Advertising Agencies and married Demetra Morris. He ends the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered, reflecting on how his parents would view his career, offering advice to young entrepreneurs, and talking about his faith and marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugene Morris, Section A2006_006_002_007, TRT: 0:17:29 ?

Eugene Morris narrates his photographs.