

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnny M. Brown

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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>	Brown, Johnny, 1943-2009
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 21, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:05:25).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Retail entrepreneur Johnny M. Brown (1943 - 2009 ) owned a Goodyear Tire franchise. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 21, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_148
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Businessman Johnny Mack Brown, of the Brown Tire Corporation, was the fifth independent-and the first African American-Goodyear dealer in the country. He was born in 1943 in rural Alabama. His father, Abe, was a sharecropper and his mother, Josephine, did housework in the South. Brown was the seventh of 12 children. Brown and his siblings were also hired out to pick and chop cotton in the 1960s for \$2 per day. After his father's death in 1962, Brown and his brothers decided to finish college and go into business in order to take of their mother.

Brown graduated with a B.A. from Chicago State College and then earned a Master's degree from Governor's State College. He and his five brothers pooled together \$19,000 to start a business, but they could not, because they were turned down for a Small Business Administration Loan. Brown took a job teaching as well as a job at Goodyear Tire changing tires. The Goodyear store was losing money and the time was right for Brown, who was able to use the money he and his brothers had saved. In 1970, the store changed from Goodyear to Johnny Brown's Tire Company.

As President and Chairman of the Board for the Brown Tire Corporation, Brown saw his business expand from one store to a large corporation with multiple Chicago locations in addition to stores in Atlanta, Georgia and Cleveland, Ohio.

Aside from his busy career, Brown still found to help the community. He was honored with various awards for his continued support and involvement with the community and, most importantly, with children. Brown had twin sons, Johnny Jr. and Joshua, also of Chicago.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Johnny M. Brown was conducted by Adele Hodge on August 21, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Retail entrepreneur Johnny M. Brown (1943 -

2009 ) owned a Goodyear Tire franchise.

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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:

Brown, Johnny, 1943-2009

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Johnny, 1943-2009--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:

Retail Entrepreneur

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Johnny M. Brown, August 21, 2002. 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 Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:08  
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Johnny M. Brown describes his family background. His mother, Josephine Mullen-Brown was born on February 8, 1918 in Gallion, Alabama to a plantation owner Mack Mullen and his wife, who died during Josephine's childhood. Brown's father, Abe Brown, was born on June 14, 1910 in Hale County, Alabama to sharecroppers Frank Brown and Jane Brown. Abe Brown was a sharecropper in Dayton, Alabama; but moved his family to Demopolis, Alabama to pursue a career in cement mixing. Johnny M. Brown was born on April 6, 1943 in and was the seventh of twelve brothers and sisters. Because of the size of his family, Brown lived with his uncle Mack Mullen in Tuscaloosa, Alabama for five years of his childhood, where he attended Castle Hill Elementary School. It was from his uncle that he learned how to be an entrepreneur. Brown graduated from U.S. Jones High School in 1961; and, in

1962, he moved to Chicago, Illinois to find work and attend Chicago State University.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:06  
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Johnny M. Brown describes his experience at Chicago State University in Illinois and starting his business with Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. In 1962, Brown began work as a lab technician for Corn Products International to pay his tuition to attend Chicago State University, where he studied education and took business administration classes. For three years while still in college, Brown worked as a teacher at Burnside High School. In 1970, Brown received his B.A. degree in education and was encouraged to begin an eight-week program with the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. With the support of five of his brothers, Brown began a franchise with Goodyear; and, in 1971, they started Johnny M. Brown Tire Company, which operated seven dealerships in Chicago, Illinois; Atlanta, Georgia; and Cleveland, Ohio. Brown reflects on the difficulties that black entrepreneurs faced after integration, including the struggles to get insurance, small business loans, and purchasing real estate.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:05  
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Johnny M. Brown describes the difficulties facing his tire dealerships and other black-owned businesses. As President and Chairman of Brown Tire Corporation, Brown has seen his business expand to seven locations nationwide. He describes the difficulties of establishing these locations, such as his confrontation with Chicago real estate businessman Arthur Rubloff about his Evergreen Plaza dealership and Goodyear's change in focus away from dealerships and towards mass merchandisers. Brown discusses the businesses of Chicago HistoryMakers Edward Gardner, John H. Johnson, George Johnson, Albert Johnson, and Dempsey Travis. He laments about the lack of black-owned businesses being passed from one generation to another and the difficulty these businesses have in establishing a reliable line of credit. He also discusses the difficulty of adapting to changing business trends in the tire industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:06  
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Johnny M. Brown talks about his childhood, marriage to Jane Mall Brown, and raising his sons. Brown grew up in Demopolis, Alabama with eleven siblings: Dorothy Brown, Selton M. Brown, Abram Brown, Jr., Jimmy Brown, Matthew Brown, TarLee W. Brown, Hester M. Brown, George E. Brown, Threet W. Brown, Rhonda M. Brown, and Robert W. Brown. After his father, Abe Brown, died in 1962, Brown's mother raised all twelve of her children with little help, providing an example for Brown to raise his own sons. Brown was married to Jane Mall Brown in 1972. In 1977, the couple had twin sons, Johnny M. Brown, Jr. and Joshua Brown, who Brown raised after his divorce in 1986. Both of Brown's sons attended Whitney M. Young Magnet High School in Chicago, Illinois. Brown is involved in HistoryMaker Robert Starks' Living Legends organization, which honors black business owners who pass on their understanding of business and the importance of black-owned businesses to their children.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:59  
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Johnny M. Brown shares his views on Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and on the importance of black politicians in strengthening black-owned businesses. He discusses the automobile business of HistoryMaker Mel Farr and the

pressures that car dealers face from manufacturers and changing market trends. He also talks about his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny M. Brown, Section A2002\_148\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:01  
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Johnny M. Brown describes the difficulties of being a black small business owner and the racism he encounters. He ends the interview by discussing the books he would like to write and narrating his photographs.