

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Raymond Haysbert, Sr.

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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>	Haysbert, Raymond V., 1920-2010
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 4, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:55).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Corporate chief executive Raymond Haysbert, Sr. (1920 - 2010 ) the co-founder, former president, and CEO of Parks Sausages, based in Baltimore, Maryland. Haysbert was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 4, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_120
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Prominent Baltimore businessman Raymond Haysbert was born in a slum in Cincinnati on January 19, 1920. Haysbert was the fourth of eight children, and three of his younger siblings died while he was still a child. His father moved away when he was eight years old, and with the Depression following soon after, Haysbert and his three brothers went to work. He continued with school, and after graduating he enlisted in an ROTC program at Wilberforce University in Ohio. Haysbert was forced to drop out of school his third year to make money, and when World War II broke out, he joined up with the Tuskegee Airmen in Italy.

After returning from the war, Haysbert married his college sweetheart, Carol Roberts, to whom he had been introduced by Henry Parks in 1952. Parks had opened up his Baltimore sausage factory only a year before, and was struggling to make a go of it in an environment filled with bigotry. Haysbert and Parks partnered and began selling Parks Sausage throughout Baltimore, delivering fresh sausages daily to stores. The strategy was a success, and by 1955 Parks Sausage was a sponsor of the World Series. The company, which had reported losses in its first two years in existence, was reporting gross annual profits of \$6 million by 1966 and \$9 million in 1968. Parks Sausage became the first black-owned company to go public in 1969.

Following on his successes, Haysbert was named president of the company in 1974, and when the company was sold to a conglomerate in 1977, he made more than \$1 million. By the mid-1980s, Parks Sausage was making almost \$30 million a year, and Haysbert was serving on several boards of directors, including on the Baltimore Federal Reserve. By the 1990s, however, things were not so good. Corporate clients buying massive quantities began finding other suppliers and health consciousness hurt sales. After a heart attack in 1994, Haysbert handed over the presidency to his son, Reginald, but remained on as CEO. At the same time, he bought back the 49 percent of the company owned by Sara Lee, making Haysbert a 97.5 percent owner of the company. Creditors continued to add up, however, and by 1995, Parks was sold.

Today, Haysbert is still active on the front of encouraging African American-owned businesses, and is president of a family catering business, Forum Caterers. In light of his recent heart troubles, he has also become active with the American Heart Association, serving as honorary chairman of Operation Heartbeat.

Mr. Haysbert passed away on May 24, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 4, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate chief executive Raymond Haysbert, Sr. (1920 - 2010 ) the co-founder, former president, and CEO of Parks Sausages, based in Baltimore, Maryland.

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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:**

Haysbert, Raymond V., 1920-2010

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Haysbert, Raymond V., 1920-2010--Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Interviews

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African American businesspeople--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:**

Business Chief Executive

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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 Raymond Haysbert, Sr., June 4, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Raymond Haysbert, Sr., Section A2003\_120\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:32 2003/06/04

Raymond Haysbert describes his family background. Haysbert was born in Cincinnati Ohio on January 19, 1920, one of nine children. His mother, Emma Watson Haysbert, was born in Roanoke, Virginia in 1898. She had a fifth grade education and worked as a maid and laundress. His maternal grandfather's name was Isiah "Ike" Walton who was a slave in Virginia and escaped to Ohio where he "common law" married a young white woman. His father, William Haysbert, was born in Roanoke, Virginia and worked in steel mills and for the railroad. His paternal grandfather, Willie Iron Beater Haysbert, was a former slave and blacksmith who lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana but was originally from Puerto Rico. The television actor Dennis Haysbert is also his descendant. Haysbert's father used positive affirmations and taught him to "adjust his sails" to the conditions around him. Haysbert grew up in segregated Cincinnati during the Great Depression, attended Immanuel Lutheran Day School, and played sports in high school.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr., Section A2003\_120\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:25 2003/06/04

Raymond Haysbert, Sr. attended Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio with opera legend Leontyne Price. As a college student, Haysbert enjoyed dancing and buying liquor even though he only had one pair of pants and had to work. After three years of college, his father could not afford his last year so Haysbert worked as a laborer in Cincinnati in 1941. In September of that year, he joined the U.S. Army Air Corp where he trained at various locations before joining the Tuskegee Airmen in Italy as part of the ground crew during World War II. Haysbert comments on the airmen's overtraining and how this contributed to their combat success. After returning from the war, Haysbert married his college sweetheart, Carol Roberts, who introduced him to Henry Parks in 1952. Parks had opened his Baltimore, Maryland sausage factory a year before in a bigotry-filled environment. Haysbert and Parks partnered and began selling Parks Sausage throughout Baltimore and delivering fresh sausages daily to stores.

Video Oral History Interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr., Section  
A2003\_120\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:32 2003/06/04

Raymond Haysbert, Sr. describes various business aspects of Parks Sausage including the rationale behind marketing Parks sausage as a breakfast food and using a radio commercial with a little boy's voice saying, "More Parks Sausage, Mom...please" to grab people's attention. Featuring a special blend of spices in a secret recipe, Parks Sausage was originally distributed in eight states but grew to being shipped nationwide. Parks Sausage was the first African American company to go public on January 22, 1969. The company advertised in well-known magazines like Reader's Digest and was a sponsor of the New York Giants. However, Haysbert and Henry Parks, the founder of the company, knew that America would not embrace a black-owned company so they chose to market to a white audience by disguising their race. Haysbert was named President of the company in 1974 and used strategic financial maneuvers to buy the company in 1980. Haysbert recalls that the company peaked in 1992 with \$30 million in sales.

Video Oral History Interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr., Section

A2003\_120\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:12 2003/06/04

Raymond Haysbert, Sr. describes how positive thinking impacted his relations with employees. Haysbert only hired people who had a good disposition and empowered his employees to quality control the sausages. Parks Sausage Company produced sixty-two different products. However, not all product launches were a success. When they tried to distribute Italian sausage in New York and ice cream, they had trouble with the mob. As a prominent businessman in Baltimore, Maryland, Haysbert became involved with politics and supported candidates like Kweisi Mfume and counseled several U.S. Presidents. Haysbert shares his views on President Bill Clinton and Baltimore's first black mayor Kurt Schmoke. Haysbert has encountered difficult political situations by choosing to support the candidate who he feels would best improve the community rather than basing his support on race. Haysbert shares his concern for the economic injustice and lack of financial savvy within the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Raymond Haysbert, Sr., Section  
A2003\_120\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:14 2003/06/04

Raymond Haysbert, Sr. talks about being called the unofficial mayor of Baltimore, Maryland because politicians often seek his counsel and endorsement. Haysbert comments on the youth drug problem and how many young black people do not see a promising future for themselves. Haysbert talks about why he joined the Republican party. Haysbert reflects on his legacy as a helper and says that his regret is spending time inefficiently. Haysbert concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.