

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Napoleon Brandford, III

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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>	Brandford, Napoleon, 1952-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 24, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:09:57).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Investment executive Napoleon Brandford, III (1952 - ) co-founded Grigsby Brandford & Co., which became one of the nation's premier investment banking firms. In 1997, Brandford and two partners formed Siebert Brandford Shank, Inc., one of the largest female and minority owned investment banking firms in the world, with Brandford serving as chairman. Brandford holds the distinction of being named the youngest African American partner on Wall Street. Brandford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_167
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The oldest of three children, Napoleon Brandford III was born in East Chicago, Indiana, on February 23, 1952. After graduating from high school in 1970, Brandford briefly attended the University of Nevada at Reno before moving closer to home, completing his B.A. at Purdue University in 1974. Returning west,

Brandford attended the University of Southern California where he earned an M.P.A. in 1978.

After completing his graduate work, Brandford became an assistant finance director in the Dade County Finance Department, where he remained until 1982. That year he joined Shearson Lehman Brothers, Inc., as the vice president of public finance in the San Francisco office. In 1985, Brandford partnered with Calvin Grigsby to form Grigsby Brandford & Co., which became one of the nation's premier investment banking firms. While there, *Ebony* named Brandford one of its Young Tycoons in 1988. In 1997, Brandford and another partner from Grigsby Brandford & Co., Suzanne Shank, joined with Muriel Siebert to form Siebert Brandford Shank, Inc. Today, it is one of the largest female- and minority-owned investment banking firms in the world, with Brandford serving as chairman.

Brandford holds the distinction of being named the youngest African American partner on Wall Street, and he is active with a number of organizations. He serves on the boards of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Finance and Investment Committee, the Western Region of the Boy Scouts of America and the Los Angeles American Heart Association. Brandford is also active in the National Forum of Black Public Administrators and the National Association of Security Professionals. Brandford and his wife, Sharon, live in California.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Napoleon Brandford, III was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Investment executive Napoleon Brandford, III (1952 - ) co-founded Grigsby Brandford & Co., which became one of the nation's premier investment banking firms. In 1997, Brandford and two partners formed Siebert Brandford Shank, Inc., one of the largest female and minority owned investment banking firms in the world, with Brandford serving as chairman. Brandford holds the distinction of being named the youngest African American partner on Wall Street.

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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:**

Brandford, Napoleon, 1952-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Janzek, Witold (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Brandford, Napoleon, 1952---Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

## **Occupations:**

Investment 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 Napoleon Brandford, III, July 24, 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 Napoleon Brandford, III, Section A2003\_167\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:21 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford was born on February 23, 1952 to Cora and Napoleon Brandford in East Chicago, Indiana. His mother was born in Hurtsboro, Alabama to Alice and Eli Harris who migrated to East Chicago around 1930. Brandford's earliest African ancestors were brought to the United States in 1838. Brandford's father was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Brandford describes his earliest childhood memory and his childhood neighborhood. His parents divorced when Brandford was a young boy and he was raised by his mother in the Calumet section of East Chicago where his family attended the St. Mark A.M.E. Church. Brandford was surrounded by relatives as a child and remembers growing up in a tight-knit community. Although his family was impoverished, Brandford never felt poor. Brandford attended Carrie Gosch Elementary School where his favorite subject was history. He admired HistoryMaker Ernie Banks and played baseball until he was inspired to become a basketball player by Loyola University Chicago's 1963 NCAA Championship.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section A2003\_167\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:15 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford was profoundly influenced by the words of basketball player Cazzie Russell as a young boy. In eighth grade, Brandford made a pact with his basketball team to win the state championship their senior year. Brandford had a tense relationship with Bill Holzback, the head basketball at East Chicago Roosevelt High School in East Chicago, Indiana, but he respected Hank Zawacki, another coach on the staff. Brandford and his teammates won the Indiana Boys State Basketball title in 1970. The

best player on the winning team was Jim Bradley who later played for the Los Angeles Lakers. Brandford and another teammate, John Davis, were recruited to play at the collegiate level by the University of Nevada in Reno. The summer before his freshman year of college, Brandford worked at Union Carbide Corporation. He describes the steel mill culture of East Chicago, where many of his peers proceeded directly from high school into steel mills. Brandford also talks about race relations in East Chicago, his mentors as a youth and his experience playing college basketball.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section A2003\_167\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:15 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford describes his experience of the San Francisco Bay Area while playing basketball for the University of Nevada in Reno, Nevada. In college, Brandford majored in political science. He participated in a black student sit-in at the student union to demand a student office for African Americans on campus. His political activism led to the termination of his basketball scholarship and he transferred to Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana in 1972. A disagreement with coach Fred Schaus at Purdue led Brandford to abandon his dream of playing professional basketball. He focused on his studies and fulfilled a promise to his grandmother to complete his studies when he graduated in 1974. Brandford then enrolled at the University of Southern California School (USC) School of Law in Los Angeles, where he met politician C. Delores Tucker. Brandford dropped out after one year, and decided to pursue a master's of public administration at USC. After graduating in 1978, he moved to Miami, Florida with his wife, Sharon Brandford, to join the Dade County Managers Program where his interest in the finance sector was mentored by Bill Erickson from the County's finance department.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section A2003\_167\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:57 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford learned about municipal government and investment banking while working as the assistant finance director in Dade County, Florida. In 1983,

Brandford began working at Shearson/American Express. While there, he cultivated a client base in the African American community and sought advice from influential politicians like Iola Williams, Eugene “Gus” Newport, Osby Davis, and Willie Brown. In 1985, he started his own investment banking firm, Grigsby Brandford, with Calvin Grigsby. Other minority firms founded around that time included Daniels & Bell; Pryor, Govan, and Counts; and W R Lazard. Mayor Harold Washington’s support of the minority investment banking community led to a connection with Albert “Al” Johnson, who became one of Brandford’s mentors. Brandford describes his business strategy, bond deals in the City of Chicago, and the impact of black mayors on black businesses and minority firms. He also talks about the National Association of Securities Professionals, mentor Travers Bell, and winning a \$504 million deal at the L.A. Convention Center where Goldman Sachs was also competing for the deal.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section A2003\_167\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:31 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford describes the municipal bond arena and his work with municipalities like the City of Chicago, which grew tremendously under Mayor Eugene Sawyer due to the foundation laid by Mayor Harold Washington. He also talks about strategic investments in his firm’s infrastructure. At Grigsby Brandford’s founding in 1985, Brandford became the youngest African American named partner on Wall Street at the age of thirty-three. Brandford reflects upon his career highlights, the downturn in the African American securities industry his commitment to the public finance sector and the political nature of financing that allows him to work with Republicans. In 1996, Brandford left Brandford Grigsby to form Siebert Brandford Shank after the indictment of his partner, Calvin Grigsby, who was later acquitted. The new firm focused on water and sewer, and transportation, and grew into one of the top second tier firms on Wall Street. It is also one of the largest female and minority-owned investment banking firms worldwide. Brandford shares his hopes for the future of the firm.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section

A2003\_167\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:00 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford talks about the investment banking industry, the benefits of working in the public sector, and his book “Hoosiers, Too: The Road Warriors,” which gives an account of the 1970 Indiana State Boys Basketball championship team. Brandford also emphasizes the importance of African American history and a college education. He has served on the NCAA Leadership Advisory Board with the NCAA’s chief operating officer, Dan Boggan, and other business leaders like Kenneth Chenault, Calvin Hill, and Bob Holland. Brandford describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He also reflects on his mother’s pride in his accomplishments and his grandfather’s influence in his life. Brandford narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Napoleon Brandford, III, Section  
A2003\_167\_001\_007, TRT: 0:09:38 2003/07/24

Napoleon Brandford continues to narrate his photographs.