

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Oliver, John Jacob "Jake", 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver,
Dates:	November 12, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:17:30).
Abstract:	Corporate lawyer and newspaper publishing chief executive John Jacob "Jake" Oliver (1945 -) is the publisher and CEO of the Afro-American newspaper and is the great-grandson of Afro-American founder, John Murphy, Sr. Oliver was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 12, 2003, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_273
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, great grandson of *Afro-American Newspaper* founder John J. Murphy and current CEO of the *Afro-American Newspapers*, was born July 20, 1945 in Baltimore, Maryland. His entrance into sixth grade was used to integrate the previously all white John E. Howard Elementary School. Oliver attended Garrison Junior High School and graduated from Baltimore City College High School in 1963. He attended the University of Maryland for two years, but transferred to Fisk University in Nashville, where he flourished under the tutelage of Dr. Jimmy Lawson, Dr. Theodore Courtney, David Driskell and Arna

Bontemps. Oliver graduated from Fisk University in 1969 where he was a student leader. He went on to Columbia University Law School where he earned his J.D. degree in 1972.

From 1972 to 1978, Oliver practiced corporate law as an associate with the firm of Davis, Polk and Wardell in New York City. It was founding partner J. W. Davis who had lost the landmark federal *Brown v. The Board Education* case. Returning to the Washington and Baltimore area, Oliver served as corporate counsel for General Electric from 1978 to 1982. However, Oliver decided to return to help with the family newspaper, the *Afro-American*, and then, in 1982, Oliver became its publisher, chairman and chief operating officer.

Since taking over the helm, Oliver has overhauled the *Afro-American Newspapers* and the African American (the AFRO) publishing business, resulting in increased circulation. Today, the AFRO is digitally connected to three offices in Baltimore, Washington, D.C. and Richmond as well as its printer in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Oliver serves as a board member of First Mariner Bank, past president of the National Newspapers Publishers Association (NNPA) and chairman of the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 12, 2003, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate lawyer and newspaper publishing chief executive John Jacob "Jake" Oliver (1945 -) is the publisher and CEO of the Afro-American newspaper and is the great-grandson of Afro-American founder, John Murphy, Sr.

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:

Oliver, John Jacob "Jake", 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Oliver, John Jacob "Jake", 1945---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Corporate Lawyer

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, November 12, 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).

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 John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/11/12

John Jacob “Jake” Oliver was born on July 20, 1945 in Baltimore, Maryland. Oliver’s mother, Marye Thompson Oliver, grew up in Somerset, Pennsylvania where her father worked as a barber. She attended Fanny Jackson Coppin Normal School in Baltimore, Maryland. Oliver’s father, John Oliver, Sr., was born in Brazil, Indiana. He graduated from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana and moved to Baltimore where he lived with HistoryMakers William H. Murphy, Sr. and John Murphy, III. Oliver’s paternal great-grandfather, John H. Murphy, Sr., founded the Baltimore Afro-American in 1892. Oliver is related to the Murphys through his paternal grandmother, Rose Murphy Oliver. Oliver grew up on Baltimore’s Madison Avenue in an upper middle-class neighborhood. During his childhood, his mother taught at William Alexander Elementary School, the same school he and his sister attended, and his father worked for the Afro-American as mechanical department superintendent and later became a vice president of the company.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 2003/11/12

John Jacob “Jake” Oliver attended William Alexander Elementary School, which was located in a middle-class African American community in Baltimore, Maryland. After the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) ruling, he transferred to John Eager Howard Elementary School, which served a predominately poor white population. The murder of Emmett Till in 1955 awakened Oliver’s racial consciousness. Oliver attended Baltimore’s Garrison Junior High School, which was predominantly

Jewish, and where he met African American students from other neighborhoods. In 1960, he entered Baltimore City College, an all-boys public magnet school, where he devoted himself to swimming to the detriment of his grade point average. At Baltimore City College, Oliver enjoyed his German and history classes, developed a good relationship with his homeroom teacher and became friends with future journalist Michael Olesker. Oliver graduated in 1963 and enrolled at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/11/12

John Jacob “Jake” Oliver enrolled at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland in 1963. His second night on campus, a member of the football team assaulted him with a racial slur. Oliver feared for his life after the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Maryland’s hostile campus atmosphere informed his decision to drop out. Oliver’s parents enrolled him at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Initially reluctant to attend another southern school, Oliver developed his leadership skills and interest in journalism at Fisk. He pledged Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and served as editor-in-chief of the Fisk Forum which he used to report on the emerging Black Power Movement and events, such as the 1967 student riots in Nashville. He studied history under Dr. Theodore Currier, Dr. Raymond Von Winbush, Dr. Arna Bontemps, Dr. Gerald McWhorter, and HistoryMaker Dr. David Driskell. Oliver graduated in 1969 and entered the CLEO pre-law summer Program in New York, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 2003/11/12

John Jacob “Jake” Oliver’s mother died during his junior year at Fisk University. After graduating from Fisk University in 1969, he moved to New York City where he attended CLEO summer pre-law courses and worked as an assistant to the night editor at the New York Times. While working at the Times, he interacted with prominent journalists, such as Harrison Salisbury and HistoryMaker Charlayne Hunter-Gault; had conversations about Native

American history with workers in the pressroom; and spoke with prostitutes in Times Square on his way to work at night. One night, Oliver unknowingly walked into the Stonewall Riots. From 1969 to 1972, Oliver attended Columbia Law School in New York where he developed an interest in tax law. There, professors used the Socratic Method rather than rote memorization techniques. Oliver joined the Wall Street firm of Davis Polk & Wardwell upon graduation. The head of the firm's banking segment taught Oliver how to write loan agreements and currency switch transactions.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_005, TRT: 0:30:30 2003/11/12

John Jacob "Jake" Oliver was an associate at Wall Street law firm Davis Polk & Wardwell, from 1972 to 1978, where he networked with other black lawyers and met Kenneth Chenault, who was a summer intern at the time. In 1978, Oliver became corporate counsel for General Electric and after two years, transferred to the company's Information Services sector (GEIS) where he brokered acquisitions of software companies such as Software International. In 1981, Oliver became vice chairman of Afro-American Newspapers. He obtained financing from Baltimore banks to automate the Afro's operations, but was voted out of office when he presented his plan to the company's board of directors. The expiration of the opposition faction's control of the company's voting trust in 1985, allowed Oliver and his cousin HistoryMaker Reverend Frances Murphy Draper to assume control of the company. Oliver computerized the production department and reformed the paper's delivery procedures, reducing staff and increasing circulation.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_006, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/11/12

John Jacob "Jake" Oliver has attempted to mend relations with family members who opposed his and HistoryMaker Frances Murphy Draper's takeover of the Afro-American Newspapers. As CEO and publisher, Oliver has modernized the newspaper by eliminating old typesetting techniques in favor of electronic pagination; launched the newspaper's digital edition in 1994, making the Afro-

American one of the first national newspapers to have an online presence; and, published articles on hip hop to reach a younger audience. In 1999, he was elected president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). He attempted to unify member newspapers and reached out to other minority newspaper associations during his four year tenure. Oliver talks about notable Afro-American Newspapers journalists including war correspondents, Ollie Stewart and Art Carter; sports writer Sam Lacy; Bettye Moss; and Moses Newsome. He also talks about artists Romare Bearden and Thomas Stockett, both of whom drew cartoons for the newspaper.

Video Oral History Interview with John Jacob "Jake" Oliver, Section A2003_273_001_007, TRT: 0:18:45 2003/11/12

John Jacob “Jake” Oliver was president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) from 1999 to 2003. He served as a chairman on the Maryland Higher Education Commission, which reviews the curricula and budgets of all colleges and universities in the State of Maryland. Oliver comments upon the relationship between politics and African American newspapers. He hopes to be remembered for his advocacy on behalf of the Afro-American Newspapers. Oliver describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, considers what he would have done differently, and reflects upon his legacy.