

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Owen Nichols

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Nichols, Owen D.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Owen Nichols,
Dates:	August 23, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:07:46).
Abstract:	Academic administrator Owen Nichols (1929 - 2018) was the former Vice President for Administration and Secretary of the Board of Trustees for Howard University. He was also a research chemist at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, a physical science analyst for the Defense Documentation Center, and worked for the National Air Pollution Control Administration. Nichols was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 23, 2004, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_139
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Owen Douglas Nichols was born on April 8, 1929 in Raleigh, North Carolina. His mother was a homemaker and his father worked as a janitor at Meredith College. He earned his high school diploma from Washington High School in 1948 where he was active in the band and Glee Club and valedictorian of his class.

Nichols attended Shaw University from 1948 until 1950 on an academic scholarship. While at Shaw, he worked as a lab assistant and pledged Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. In 1950, he joined the United States Army, and attended Officers Candidate School in Fort Raleigh, Kansas. He was also accepted in the Army Corps of Engineering program and served his country in Korea. He retired from the army in 1953, returned to Shaw, and earned his bachelor's of science degree in chemistry in 1955. Nichols then went on to earn his master's degree in physical chemistry from Howard University in 1958.

From 1958 until 1959, Nichols worked as an associate professor of chemistry at South Carolina State College. Leaving South Carolina State, he was a Research Chemist at the United States Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C., until 1962. Nichols spent the next four years working as a physical science analyst for the Defense Documentation Center in Alexandria, Virginia. From 1966 until 1968, he worked as a deputy director for the National Air Pollution Control Administration, where he was responsible for processing technical information on air pollution. In 1969, Nichols was recruited to Howard University by his former classmate at Shaw, James Cheek, who was then serving as Howard's President. Nichols served in various positions at Howard for nearly twenty years. When he retired in 1988 he was the vice president for administration and secretary of the Board of Trustees.

Since 1989, Nichols has served as an advisor, coordinator and organizer for the African American Festival of

Academic Achievement, an event highlighting the accomplishments of Montgomery County Maryland's youth. In 1995, Nichols was appointed to the Montgomery College (Maryland's largest community college) Board of Trustees.

Nichols has received numerous awards and honors for his civic, community and educational achievements. He is the author of several publications including a book in memory of his father, titled *Things My Father Taught Me*, which was published in 1998.

Nichols passed away on May 19, 2018.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Owen Nichols was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 23, 2004, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator Owen Nichols (1929 - 2018) was the former Vice President for Administration and Secretary of the Board of Trustees for Howard University. He was also a research chemist at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, a physical science analyst for the Defense Documentation Center, and worked for the National Air Pollution Control Administration.

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:

Nichols, Owen D.

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Nichols, Owen D.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Physicist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Owen Nichols, August 23, 2004. 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 Owen Nichols, Section A2004_139_001_001, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Owen Nichols was born on April 8, 1929 in Raleigh, North Carolina. His mother, Pearl Hockaday Nichols, was also born in Raleigh and was a homemaker. His maternal great-grandfather was a white Raleigh businessman and his maternal great-grandmother was African American. Nichols' father, William Henry Nichols, was born on his family's farm in Garner, North Carolina. Nichols' paternal grandmother had eight children and lived to 108 years old. Nichols' father and his uncle Jim were capable construction workers. His father worked as a janitor at Meredith College, a white women's college in Raleigh where Nichols was first exposed to science. His father taught him many lessons such as how to negotiate, fish and paint house interiors. Nichols has nine siblings that ranged in skin tone; he once witnessed his brother pass for white and sit in the front of a bus. Nichols remembers family traditions like Christmas decoration and eating black-eyed peas on New Year's. He was a shy child and started school two years late.

Video Oral History Interview with Owen Nichols, Section A2004_139_001_002, TRT: 0:30:34 ?

Owen Nichols was raised in an African American neighborhood in Raleigh, North Carolina near the all-white Oakwood Cemetery. A white family who sold tombstones lived on the corner, but did not participate in the otherwise tight-knit community. Inspired by 'Taps' players at funerals, Nichols learned to play the trumpet at St. Monica's School, a small, all-black Catholic school he attended. After being corrected by the white nuns, he lost his Southern accent and became sensitive to speaking with proper grammar. In seventh grade, Nichols worked at a grocery store to earn money to purchase the family's first bathtub. After deciding to be baptized in eighth grade, the Baptist church became a major influence on him. Nichols attended segregated Washington High School where he enjoyed math and science, sang in the choir, was first trumpet in the band and aspired to design clothes. Nichols was valedictorian of his high school class and earned a scholarship to Shaw University, in Raleigh, where he majored in chemistry.

Video Oral History Interview with Owen Nichols, Section A2004_139_001_003, TRT: 0:30:09 ?

Owen Nichols matriculated at Shaw University in 1949. There he was interested in divinity but majored in chemistry and joined Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. In 1950, he joined the U.S. Army where he served as a clerk in Fort Bliss, Texas instead of completing basic training. He was later accepted to Officer Candidate School in Fort Riley, Kansas and sent to Korea with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Nichols married his wife in 1952 while on emergency leave. After returning from the Korean War in 1953, Nichols completed his B.A. degree at Shaw and graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1955. He completed his M.A. degree in physical chemistry at Howard University and was hired as an associate professor at South Carolina State College in 1958. In 1959, Nichols moved back to D.C. where he worked at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, Department of Defense and Air Pollution Technical Information Center, until accepting an administrative position at Howard University under HistoryMaker Dr. James Cheek in 1969.

Video Oral History Interview with Owen Nichols, Section A2004_139_001_004, TRT: 0:28:42 ?

Owen Nichols was hired by his friend Howard University President and HistoryMaker Dr. James Cheek in 1969 to work as an administrator. During his time at Howard, he saw the creation of the Howard University School of

Communications and the heyday of WHUR-FM, Howard's college radio station where disc jockey Melvin Lindsey, pioneered the Quiet Storm radio format. Nichols credits manager Jim Watkins with the success of both WHUR-FM and WHMM-TV (later, WHUT-TV), Howard's college television station which has had some financial challenges in recent years. After his retirement in 1989, Nichols joined the Board of Trustees at Montgomery College, the largest community college in Maryland. In 1989, former NAACP President Roscoe Nix approached Nichols, and together they created the African American Festival of Academic Excellence and Achievement. Nichols describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered; and reflects upon his life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Owen Nichols, Section A2004_139_001_005, TRT: 0:08:30 ?
Owen Nichols narrates his photographs.