

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cathy Hughes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hughes, Cathy, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes,
Dates:	March 2, 2005 and September 21, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004 and 2005
Physical Description:	18 Betacame SP videocassettes (8:56:47).
Abstract:	Broadcast chief executive Cathy Hughes (1947 -) is the founder of Radio One, the nation's largest black-owned radio chain, and TV One, which features programming aimed at African American audiences. Hughes is the first African American woman to head a media company that is publicly traded on the U.S. Stock Exchange. Hughes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 2, 2005 and September 21, 2004, in Lanham, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_171
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio maven Cathy Hughes was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1947. Beginning her career in radio in 1969, Hughes' first position was with KOWH, a black radio station in Omaha. Her successes there prompted the Howard University School of Communications to offer her a position as a lecturer and as Assistant to the Dean of Communications.

In 1973, Hughes was named general sales manager to WHUR-FM in Washington, D.C, and by 1975 was hired as the general manager of the station. Under her guidance, WHUR-FM, which had been struggling along with \$300,000 in annual sales revenues, increased its annual revenues to more than \$3.5 million. In 1978, Hughes left WHUR for WYCB Radio, where she served as the vice president and general manager of the station.

Hughes and her husband at the time, Dewey Hughes, decided they wanted to buy their own radio station in 1979, and after being rejected by thirty-two banks, they found a lender. With their loan, they purchased WOL, a small Washington, D.C. station and Radio One was born. While Hughes wanted a talk format for the station, the bank was pressing for music. A compromise was reached permitting Hughes to have a morning talk show program that was followed by music programming throughout the day.

Hughes' marriage ended shortly after purchasing the station and she began her path as a single mother. She purchased her husband's share in the station, but hard times soon forced she and her son, Alfred, to give up their apartment and move into the station to make ends meet. Over time, however, the station began turning a profit, largely due to the success of her talk show.

Since the early days of being a station owner, Hughes' rise has been remarkable. Today, Radio One owns 65 radio stations throughout every major market in the country, making the company the largest black-owned radio chain in

the nation. In January of 2004, Hughes launched TV One, a cable television channel targeted at the African American community.

Today, Hughes has the distinction of being the first African American woman to head a media company publicly traded on the U.S. Stock Exchange, and she continues to serve as Chairperson of Radio One.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cathy Hughes was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 2, 2005 and September 21, 2004, in Lanham, Maryland, and was recorded on 18 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast chief executive Cathy Hughes (1947 -) is the founder of Radio One, the nation's largest black-owned radio chain, and TV One, which features programming aimed at African American audiences. Hughes is the first African American woman to head a media company that is publicly traded on the U.S. Stock Exchange.

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:

Hughes, Cathy, 1947-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hughes, Cathy, 1947---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Chief Executive

Chief Executive Officer

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|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 Cathy Hughes, March 2, 2005 and September 21, 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 Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Cathy Hughes was born on April 22, 1947 to William A. Woods and HistoryMaker Helen Jones Woods. Her paternal grandparents, Fannie and Edgar Woods, worked as a maid and chauffeur in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence Clifton Jones, was the first African American to earn an Ed.D. degree at Iowa State University, and founded Mississippi's Piney Woods Country Life School in 1909. After marrying her mother, her father completed high school and became the first African American accounting graduate of Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. While working for the Internal Revenue Service, a racist client assaulted him, prompting her father to open a private accounting practice. His clientele extended to Chicago and included Reverend Clarence Cobb, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, and Muhammad Ali. After her father's untimely death at forty-five years old, Hughes moved to Washington, D.C., where she turned down a position at the Office of Minority Business Enterprise.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_002, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Cathy Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence Clifton Jones, dedicated his life to educating the impoverished African American community. The first African American to receive an Ed.D. degree from Iowa State University, he and his wife, Grace Morris Allen Jones, founded Piney Woods Country Life School in rural Mississippi. They established the Cotton Blossom Singers choir and a band to raise money for the school. Hughes' grandmother passed away when her mother, HistoryMaker Helen Jones Woods, was three years old. Although Helen was a talented musician, Jones disapproved of popular music, so Woods ran away from home at the age of fourteen. Jones was the first African American featured on 'This Is Your Life,' raising seven million dollars. A critic of the media, he filed an injunction against Johnson Publishing Company, halting the publication of his interview. Hughes recalls dinners at her grandfather's home, where she once confronted Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett about his racist propaganda.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_003, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Cathy Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence C. Jones, dedicated his life to serving the impoverished community of Mississippi, where he founded Piney Woods Country Life School. Hughes describes how he and other great African American men were supported by the sacrifices of black women. At the time of the interview, the school still used corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. Hughes' mother, Helen Jones Woods, ran away with the school band at the age of fourteen. Gaining popularity, the band was renamed the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and played alongside such notable musicians as Billie Holiday, Moms Mabley, Redd Foxx and Nat King Cole, until they were rendered bankrupt by theft and mismanagement. Hughes' parents then moved to Omaha, Nebraska, where her mother joined the Omaha Symphony. When she was discovered to be passing for white, she was fired, leading Hughes' mother to renounce music permanently. Hughes recalls her mother's strength and her lessons about giving to others.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_004, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Cathy Hughes grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where she lived with a foster family until she was three years old, while her mother toured with the

International Sweethearts of Rhythm. She recalls her mother's visits, and the sounds and smells of growing up in Omaha. Upon her foster parents' deaths, her parents married, and the family lived in the Franklin Plaza public housing projects, a close-knit community. Inspired by her mother's activism with the St. Martin de Porres Club, Hughes was arrested at the age of fourteen for trying to integrate a local swimming pool. She attended Saint John's School, Sacred Heart Elementary School and Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, where her tuition was paid by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Her family moved to join her grandfather, Laurence C. Jones, in Piney Woods, Mississippi, but returned to Omaha following an altercation between him and her mother. After Hughes' mother quit the music industry, she became a nurse and spent her later years volunteering with children.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_005, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Cathy Hughes grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where her mother instilled in her an interest in reading and art through frequent trips to Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum, the public library, and the grocery store's bookstand. An inquisitive and rebellious teenager, Hughes tried to get expelled from Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, where most students were white and wealthy. Hughes became pregnant with her son, HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins, III, at sixteen, and married her son's father. Shortly after becoming a mother, she divorced her husband to spare her son from exposure to gang activity. Hughes raised him independently while taking African American studies courses at the University of Nebraska Omaha, where she dated Dr. Milton White. When journalist Tony Brown offered White a department chairmanship at Howard University's newly established School of Communications in Washington, D.C., Hughes and her son followed. Shortly afterward, Hughes accepted a position as the School of Communications' community liaison.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_006, TRT: 0:31:03 ?

Cathy Hughes moved to Washington, D.C. in the 1970s, after beginning her broadcast career at KOWH Radio in Omaha, Nebraska. Through her contact with Tony Brown, the dean of Howard University's School of Communications, she was appointed as a community activist and lecturer in the department, later joining the staff of the university's radio station, WHUR Radio. In 1973, she was appointed the general sales manager of WHUR Radio, and in 1975, she became its general manager. During her tenure, Hughes pioneered the Quiet Storm radio format, but her proposal that it be licensed to generate revenue was rejected by the university. Disillusioned by the hostility that she faced from her supervisors and the administration's lack of support for her innovative ideas, such as creating a black Muzak format, Hughes left the station in 1978. She recalls her interest in radio as a child, her aptitude for radio and television programming, and how WHUR-FM became licensed to Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_007, TRT: 0:31:07 ?

Cathy Hughes served as the general sales manager at Howard University's WHUR Radio in Washington, D.C. in 1973, and in 1975 was hired as the station's general manager. While working at WHUR, she studied broadcast management at Harvard University and psychographic programming at the University of Chicago. She left WHUR Radio to establish WYCB Radio with the Washington Area Broadcasters, where she served as vice president and general manager of the station. In 1979, Hughes and her husband at the time, Dewey Hughes, made a bid for a small Washington, D.C. station, WOL Radio, where Dewey had worked as general manager, during its distress sale. With financial assistance from investors recruited by her friend HistoryMaker Ofield

Dukes and additional loans from Herb Fame and Linda Greene of Peaches and Herb, the Hughes successfully purchased their first station, the predecessor to Radio One. Hughes recalls the night she took over WOL and her first radio broadcast there.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_008, TRT: 0:30:47 ?

Cathy Hughes and her husband, Dewey Hughes, purchased WOL Radio, the first Radio One station, in 1979. That year, Hughes met Reverend Mozelle J. Fuller, who guided her spiritually through her early career as a radio industry executive. Following her divorce from Dewey Hughes, Hughes became the sole owner of Radio One. Her financial mentors, HistoryMakers Herbert Wilkins and Terry Jones, and broadcast executive Skip Finley supported her through her early years of hardship as a new business owner. Seven years after Hughes purchased WOL Radio, the station began to generate a profit. At the age of twenty-one, Hughes' son HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins III became a Radio One stakeholder, and together, they purchased a second station. At her son's request, Hughes sacrificed her aspirations to host her own talk show to oversee the expansion of Radio One into a three billion dollar corporation with over 2,000 employees. In 2004, Hughes launched TV One, a cable television channel targeted at African American audiences.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_001_009, TRT: 0:22:51 ?

Cathy Hughes and her son, HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins III, purchased Radio One's second radio station, Majic 102.3 to expand their holdings into FM broadcast. They soon acquired broadcaster Ragan Henry's station in Baltimore, Maryland, and expanded Radio One into further markets, including Atlanta, Georgia. In 2000, Radio One bought twelve radio stations from Clear Channel for \$1.3 billion dollars, the largest acquisition by an African American firm at the time. In January of 2004, Hughes launched TV One, a cable television channel targeted at the African American community. Hughes recalls approaching thirty-three banks in the 1970s to secure a loan to buy WOL Radio; her early loan payment strategy; her business relationship with her son; his business education at University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School; her son's renaming of her company as Radio One; and taking Radio One public in 1999 with twenty-two stations. She also reflects upon her legacy and her hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_010, TRT: 0:28:01 ?

Cathy Hughes was born on April 22, 1947 to William A. Woods and HistoryMaker Helen Jones Woods. Her paternal grandparents, Fannie and Edgar Woods, worked as a maid and chauffeur in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence Clifton Jones, was the first African American to earn an Ed.D. degree at Iowa State University, and founded Mississippi's Piney Woods Country Life School in 1909. After marrying her mother, her father completed high school and became the first African American accounting graduate of Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. While working for the Internal Revenue Service, a racist client assaulted him, prompting her father to open a private accounting practice. His clientele extended to Chicago and included Reverend Clarence Cobb, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, and Muhammad Ali. After her father's untimely death at forty-five years old, Hughes moved to Washington, D.C., where she turned down a position at the Office of Minority Business Enterprise.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_011, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Cathy Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence Clifton Jones, dedicated his life to educating the impoverished African American community. The first African

American to receive an Ed.D. degree from Iowa State University, he and his wife, Grace Morris Allen Jones, founded Piney Woods Country Life School in rural Mississippi. They established the Cotton Blossom Singers choir and a band to raise money for the school. Hughes' grandmother passed away when her mother, HistoryMaker Helen Jones Woods, was three years old. Although Helen was a talented musician, Jones disapproved of popular music, so Woods ran away from home at the age of fourteen. Jones was the first African American featured on 'This Is Your Life,' raising seven million dollars. A critic of the media, he filed an injunction against Johnson Publishing Company, halting the publication of his interview. Hughes recalls dinners at her grandfather's home, where she once confronted Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett about his racist propaganda.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_012, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Cathy Hughes' maternal grandfather, Laurence C. Jones, dedicated his life to serving the impoverished community of Mississippi, where he founded Piney Woods Country Life School. Hughes describes how he and other great African American men were supported by the sacrifices of black women. At the time of the interview, the school still used corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool. Hughes' mother, Helen Jones Woods, ran away with the school band at the age of fourteen. Gaining popularity, the band was renamed the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and played alongside such notable musicians as Billie Holiday, Moms Mabley, Redd Foxx and Nat King Cole, until they were rendered bankrupt by theft and mismanagement. Hughes' parents then moved to Omaha, Nebraska, where her mother joined the Omaha Symphony. When she was discovered to be passing for white, she was fired, leading Hughes' mother to renounce music permanently. Hughes recalls her mother's strength and her lessons about giving to others.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_013, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Cathy Hughes grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where she lived with a foster family until she was three years old, while her mother toured with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. She recalls her mother's visits, and the sounds and smells of growing up in Omaha. Upon her foster parents' deaths, her parents married, and the family lived in the Franklin Plaza public housing projects, a close-knit community. Inspired by her mother's activism with the St. Martin de Porres Club, Hughes was arrested at the age of fourteen for trying to integrate a local swimming pool. She attended Saint John's School, Sacred Heart Elementary School and Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, where her tuition was paid by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Her family moved to join her grandfather, Laurence C. Jones, in Piney Woods, Mississippi, but returned to Omaha following an altercation between him and her mother. After Hughes' mother quit the music industry, she became a nurse and spent her later years volunteering with children.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_014, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Cathy Hughes grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where her mother instilled in her an interest in reading and art through frequent trips to Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum, the public library, and the grocery store's bookstand. An inquisitive and rebellious teenager, Hughes tried to get expelled from Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, where most students were white and wealthy. Hughes became pregnant with her son, HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins, III, at sixteen, and married her son's father. Shortly after becoming a mother, she divorced her husband to spare her son from exposure to gang activity. Hughes raised him independently while taking African American studies courses at the University

of Nebraska Omaha, where she dated Dr. Milton White. When journalist Tony Brown offered White a department chairmanship at Howard University's newly established School of Communications in Washington, D.C., Hughes and her son followed. Shortly afterward, Hughes accepted a position as the School of Communications' community liaison.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_015, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Cathy Hughes moved to Washington, D.C. in the 1970s, after beginning her broadcast career at KOWH Radio in Omaha, Nebraska. Through her contact with Tony Brown, the dean of Howard University's School of Communications, she was appointed as a community activist and lecturer in the department, later joining the staff of the university's radio station, WHUR Radio. In 1973, she was appointed the general sales manager of WHUR Radio, and in 1975, she became its general manager. During her tenure, Hughes pioneered the Quiet Storm radio format, but her proposal that it be licensed to generate revenue was rejected by the university. Disillusioned by the hostility that she faced from her supervisors and the administration's lack of support for her innovative ideas, such as creating a black Muzak format, Hughes left the station in 1978. She recalls her interest in radio as a child, her aptitude for radio and television programming, and how WHUR-FM became licensed to Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_016, TRT: 0:28:08 ?

Cathy Hughes served as the general sales manager at Howard University's WHUR Radio in Washington, D.C. in 1973, and in 1975 was hired as the station's general manager. While working at WHUR, she studied broadcast management at Harvard University and psychographic programming at the University of Chicago. She left WHUR Radio to establish WYCB Radio with the Washington Area Broadcasters, where she served as vice president and general manager of the station. In 1979, Hughes and her husband at the time, Dewey Hughes, made a bid for a small Washington, D.C. station, WOL Radio, where Dewey had worked as general manager, during its distress sale. With financial assistance from investors recruited by her friend HistoryMaker Ofield Dukes and additional loans from Herb Fame and Linda Greene of Peaches and Herb, the Hughes successfully purchased their first station, the predecessor to Radio One. Hughes recalls the night she took over WOL and her first radio broadcast there.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_017, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Cathy Hughes and her husband, Dewey Hughes, purchased WOL Radio, the first Radio One station, in 1979. That year, Hughes met Reverend Mozelle J. Fuller, who guided her spiritually through her early career as a radio industry executive. Following her divorce from Dewey Hughes, Hughes became the sole owner of Radio One. Her financial mentors, HistoryMakers Herbert Wilkins and Terry Jones, and broadcast executive Skip Finley supported her through her early years of hardship as a new business owner. Seven years after Hughes purchased WOL Radio, the station began to generate a profit. At the age of twenty-one, Hughes' son HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins III became a Radio One stakeholder, and together, they purchased a second station. At her son's request, Hughes sacrificed her aspirations to host her own talk show to oversee the expansion of Radio One into a three billion dollar corporation with over 2,000 employees. In 2004, Hughes launched TV One, a cable television channel targeted at African American audiences.

Video Oral History Interview with Cathy Hughes, Section A2004_171_002_018, TRT: 0:30:52 ?

Cathy Hughes and her son, HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins III, purchased Radio One's second radio station, Majic 102.3 to expand their holdings into FM

broadcast. They soon acquired broadcaster Ragan Henry's station in Baltimore, Maryland, and expanded Radio One into further markets, including Atlanta, Georgia. In 2000, Radio One bought twelve radio stations from Clear Channel for \$1.3 billion dollars, the largest acquisition by an African American firm at the time. In January of 2004, Hughes launched TV One, a cable television channel targeted at the African American community. Hughes recalls approaching thirty-three banks in the 1970s to secure a loan to buy WOL Radio; her early loan payment strategy; her business relationship with her son; his business education at University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School; her son's renaming of her company as Radio One; and taking Radio One public in 1999 with twenty-two stations. She also reflects upon her legacy and her hopes for the African American community.