

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Abe Thompson

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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>	Thompson, Abe
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 7, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:51:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast chief executive and radio station manager Abe Thompson (1951 - ) served as the vice president and station manager of WCGI in Chicago, the vice-president and general manager of WRIF in Detroit, the station manager of WVAZ in Chicago, and the president and CEO of Partnership Radio in Northwest Indiana. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 7, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_249
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Abraham “Abe” Thompson, Jr., was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 22, 1951, one of seven children in his family. After graduating from Calumet High School, Thompson attended Carthage College in 1969 and then transferred to Western Illinois University where he graduated from in 1974.

In 1975, Thompson joined the staff of WVON radio in Chicago as a salesman where he quickly found success. Thompson was hired by WGCI in 1980, where he became the local sales manager, and the following year he was named general sales manager. While at WCGI in 1984, Thompson met and married his wife, Launa Thompson, and in 1985, he became the vice-president and station manager of WCGI. Thompson moved to Detroit in 1986, taking over operations at WRIF while serving as vice-president and general manager; during his two years there, he helped turn the station around. Returning to Chicago in 1988, Thompson was named station manager of WVAZ.

Thompson began marketing for films and international events in 1991, including the 1991 Cancun Jazz festival and the 1995 Sinbad’s Soul Music Festival in St. Martin. In addition, Thompson has been a highly successful motivational speaker. In 1999, Thompson became president and CEO of Partnership Radio, a group of radio stations in Northwest Indiana. In 2000, Thompson published his first book, *My Thoughts, Your Book, Our Journal*, for his son, Phoenix. In 2003, Radio Ink ranked Thompson as one of the thirty most influential African Americans in radio.

Thompson’s wife, Launa, passed away in 2004.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Abe Thompson was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 7, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast chief executive and radio station manager Abe Thompson (1951 - ) served as the vice president and station manager of WCGI in Chicago, the vice-president and general manager of WRIF in Detroit, the station manager of WVAZ in Chicago, and the president and CEO of Partnership Radio in Northwest Indiana.

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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:

Thompson, Abe

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Thompson, Abe--Interviews

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African American executives--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African Americans in radio broadcasting--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:

Radio Station Manager

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Broadcast Chief Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Abe Thompson, December 7, 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).

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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 Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Abe Thompson was born on November 22, 1951 in Chicago, Illinois to teenage

parents, Wilma Jean Bledsoe and Abraham Thompson, Sr. His mother was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and moved to Chicago where she completed the ninth grade before marrying his father. Her parents were divorced, and her mother worked at various factories in Chicago. Thompson's father was born in Meridian, Mississippi and later lived in Cleveland, Ohio, where his life was threatened after an altercation with a white boy, which prompted him to move to Chicago as well. His father was employed as a maintenance man for Argonne Laboratories in Lemont, Illinois and his mother at various stores in Chicago. Thompson's father worked at Pride Container Corporation in Chicago. Thompson was raised on the West Side where he attended Gladstone Elementary School, frequented the Marillac Social Center and visited the Maxwell Street area markets. After his parents' divorce when he was twelve, Thompson and his four brothers went to live with their father.

African American executives--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African Americans in radio broadcasting--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Abe Thompson learned the value of relationships early in life through his parents' emphasis on good manners. He and his family were members of Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois. He attended Gladstone, then Calhoun North Elementary School. At Calumet High School, he took part in many activities, played on the basketball team and was student body president. With the school music teacher, Thompson invited many famous entertainers to Calumet High, including HistoryMaker Herb Kent, who later worked for Thompson. At the encouragement of friends, Thompson enrolled in Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Disappointed that he was not given the opportunity to play varsity basketball, Thompson transferred to Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois where he did join the varsity team and majored in psychology. Statistics presented a challenge, but Thompson enjoyed learning how to interpret data. He worked at a local onion factory and as a resident advisor to pay for school.

Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Abe Thompson graduated from Western Illinois University in 1974. He began working for Ryerson steel corporation in Chicago, Illinois. Managing his brothers' singing group made him realize the advantages of a career in media, which was glamorous and better paying than his sales job at Ryerson. He searched for jobs in radio broadcasting and landed a job as a salesman at WVON in Chicago in 1975. Although the station was popular at the time, it struggled to attract a strong advertising base. Thompson established himself as a successful salesman by maintaining a good rapport with radio executive Bernadine C. Washington and other popular DJs, and helping his clients in moments of need, such as when he filled in for a missing MC at an event hosted by Arny Granat of Jam Productions. His work also put him in contact with Cedric "Ricky" Walker, owner of UniverSoul Circus. Thompson explains how WVON was acquired by the same company that owned WGCI, the complexity of statistics and his interest in religious studies.

Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Abe Thompson worked in sales at WCGI in 1975 when they transitioned from AM to FM radio. He later became WGCI's vice president and station manager. Thompson's future wife, Launa Thompson, joined the same company when hired by WVON in 1980; after working together for several years, they dated and married. He left WGCI in 1985 when he and his wife were offered positions at WRIF in Detroit, Michigan. Thompson was general manager of the station for

two years. After an unsuccessful bid to purchase WRIF, Thompson moved back to Chicago to work at WVAZ. With his company Focus Radio, he bought his first radio station, WUBU, in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After Focus dissolved, he formed Partnership Radio through which he maintains controlling interest of a radio station in South Bend, Indiana, partial ownership of the gospel station WLOK in Memphis, Tennessee and stock in Radio One and Infinity Broadcasting Corporation. Thompson's wife passed away in 2004. Thompson remembers the support he received from many after this loss.

Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:50 ?

Abe Thompson wrote a book about his thoughts on life as a way to impart advice for his son. Although he initially planned to give the book only to his family, his wife encouraged him to share it with the public. In 2000, Thompson self-published 5,000 copies of his book, 'My Thoughts, Your Journal, Our Book.' It was reprinted by HistoryMaker Haki Madhubuti's Third World Press of Chicago, Illinois. Thompson had an initial book signing at the Barnes & Noble at the Rockefeller Center in New York, New York, but since then has had limited time for travelling and promotional work. Thompson's wife passed away in 2004. Since her death, his perspective on life has changed; he feels less judgmental and tries to value each moment more. Thompson shares his thoughts on what constitutes a successful marriage and friendship. He speculates about challenges common in present-day relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with Abe Thompson, Section A2004\_249\_001\_006, TRT: 0:27:50 ?

Abe Thompson bought his first radio station, WUBU in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1989, which entailed having a tower built to create a brand new station. To celebrate his financial success with his parents, he bought them a house. Thompson talks about the impact of organizations like The National Black Media Coalition, founded by HistoryMaker Pluria Marshall, and Nation Association of Broadcasters, which were started to promote African American and minority ownership in broadcasting. He talks about the barriers that make owning radio stations difficult, how buying stock in media companies could offer African Americans a greater voice in the industry and the impact of Tom Lewis, the first black radio station owner. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, reflects upon his life, how he would like to be remembered, and his legacy.