

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ronald Jewell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jewell, Ronald, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Jewell,
Dates:	December 14, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:19:05).
Abstract:	Maintenance company chief executive and entrepreneur Ronald Jewell (1946 -) founded Jewell Industries, a residential and construction site cleaning service that is recognized as one of the top janitorial firms in the nation. In 1994, Jewell established the African American Trading Company, employing 1,000 Ghanaian farmers to grow and harvest 10,000 acres of chili peppers. Jewell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 2004, in Alexandria, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_259
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ronald Bruce Jewell was born on December 30, 1946, in Newark, New Jersey; due to financial hardship, his family moved from New Jersey to his mother's native southern Virginia. Jewell's mother was a domestic, his father a mail carrier and restaurateur. In 1966, Jewell earned his high school diploma from Central High School in Goochland County, Virginia, where he played for the basketball team. During his senior year in high school, while working as a school bus driver, Jewell became a husband and a father.

From 1966 until 1969, Jewell attended Virginia Union on a golf scholarship where he majored in history. In 1967, he helped founded the Esquire Club, a national social organization that can be found on Historically Black College campuses throughout the country. From 1969 until 1972, Jewell worked for the National Urban League as the marketing manager of a training program for professional house cleaners. In 1972, Jewell and his second wife, Adrienne, started Jewell Industries, a residential and construction site cleaning service.

In 1973, Jewell expanded the business to include commercial cleaning and, on the request of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), he created the specifications for cleaning commercial properties. In 1976, Jewell began traveling to Ghana, West Africa, familiarizing himself with the people and needs of the country. In 1993, the company was certified under the Small Business Administration's Section 8(a) Business Development program. In 1994, Jewell Industries started its floor services division after it received a government contract for a carpet installation project. In 1990, Jewell established the African American Trading Company (AATCI), employing 1,000 African farmers to grow and harvest 10,000 acres of chili peppers.

Jewell has received numerous awards for his business and civic accomplishments. His company, Jewell Industries, is recognized as one of the top janitorial firms in the nation.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ronald Jewell was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on December 14, 2004, in Alexandria, Virginia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Maintenance company chief executive and entrepreneur Ronald Jewell (1946 -) founded Jewell Industries, a residential and construction site cleaning service that is recognized as one of the top janitorial firms in the nation. In 1994, Jewell established the African American Trading Company, employing 1,000 Ghanaian farmers to grow and harvest 10,000 acres of chili peppers.

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:

Jewell, Ronald, 1946-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Jewell, Ronald, 1946---Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Cleaning personnel--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Entrepreneur

Maintenance Company Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Ronald Jewell, December 14, 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 Ronald Jewell, Section A2004_259_001_001, TRT: 0:30:54 ?

Ronald Jewell was born on December 30, 1946 in Newark, New Jersey. His mother, Thelma Jewell Freeman, was born in Goochland County, Virginia in 1921. Her mother was a midwife and delivered more than two hundred children. Jewell's mother attended the Catholic Manakin School in Goochland and Virginia Union University in Richmond, where she met Jewell's father. She later worked as a domestic. Jewell's father, Fletcher Jewell, was born in Blakely, Georgia. He attended high school in Lynchburg, Virginia then matriculated at Virginia Union. Jewell's father suffered from alcoholism, which affected the entire family. He worked as a custodian for Virginia Union University and Home Beneficial Life Insurance in Richmond; he also started a gutter cleaning business, and he would give his earnings to Jewell to safeguard. Jewell, his siblings, and his parents lived in Newark until he was six years old. At that point, they moved to Virginia, where Jewell spent significant time with his grandmother until her death in 1954.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Jewell, Section A2004_259_001_002, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Ronald Jewell spent the first years of his life in Newark, New Jersey. After the five-year old Jewell witnessed a woman being stabbed outside his family's apartment, his mother opted to move the family to Virginia. Jewell attended Manakin School in Goochland County, Virginia during his elementary and junior high school years. He excelled in reading and was talkative. He learned to play golf by working for the local country club, first retrieving golf balls, then later, caddying and working in its shop. Jewell attended First Baptist Church Manakin, which often interfered with caddy hours, to his dismay. Jewell became focused on earning and saving his own money as a self-protection against his father's alcoholism. In his early teens, Jewell was a self-described Satanist in reaction to depictions of Jesus as white and his awareness of racism. This lasted a year and a half. He attended Central High School in Goochland County and aspired to become a lawyer despite the school's lack of resources.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Jewell, Section A2004_259_001_003, TRT: 0:31:23 ?

Ronald Jewell attended Central High School in Goochland County, Virginia, where he played baseball and worked as a school bus driver when he was fifteen years old. Jewell married when he was in the eleventh grade, just after the birth of his first child. In 1965, he was among a group of black students who volunteered to integrate white schools in the area, and he became the only black person to graduate from Goochland High School in 1966. Aspiring to become a lawyer, Jewell enrolled at Virginia Union University and majored in history. Through his roommate, Al Bowers, he became involved in civil rights activism. Jewell had several jobs, including delivering clothes from campus to a local dry cleaner. He left without graduating in 1969 to provide for his family. He went to Washington D.C., where he worked for the Urban League as a marketing manager for the project Services United for Responsible and Gainful Employment. After being fired in 1972, he started his own residential and commercial cleaning business.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Jewell, Section A2004_259_001_004, TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Ronald Jewell started a cleaning business in 1972. Much of the company's work came through commercial cleaning; he had a contract with a construction company that went bankrupt in 1974, causing him \$100,000 in losses. To recoup these earnings, he opened an electronics store and funneled that money back into

his cleaning business. In the late 1970s, his residential clients grew to 300 homes. The commercial side grew in the 1980s with big contracts for Walter Reed Army Medical Center. In 1994, Jewell began operations for the African American Trading Company, Inc.; the company was incorporated two years later in Ghana. Jewell's vision for the company was to decrease the amount of after-harvest crop loss in sub-Saharan Africa. He specifically wanted to focus on spice export. At the time of the interview, his son ran Jewell Spice Company from Ghana. Jewell talks about his children and their involvements in Jewell Industries. Jewell reflects upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Jewell, Section A2004_259_001_005, TRT: 0:14:47 ?
Ronald Jewell narrates his photographs.