

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Levi Knox, III

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Knox, George Levi, III, 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III,
Dates:	March 29, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:12:08).
Abstract:	Corporate executive George Levi Knox, III (1943 -) is the former Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Phillip Morris Companies, Inc. Knox was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 29, 2005, in LaJolla, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_084
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired vice president, corporate affairs for the Phillip Morris Company (now Altria Group, Inc.), George Levi Knox III was born September 6, 1943 in Indianapolis, Indiana. His great-grandfather, George L. Knox wrote *Life as I Remember It: As a Slave and a Freeman* in 1895 owned the *Indianapolis Freeman*, a tontorial parlor and the Negro league baseball's Indianapolis ABC's. Knox's father, George L. Knox, II was a Tuskegee Airman who presided over the 1944 Freeman Field Mutiny court martial and later made the Air Force his career. Growing up in the military, Knox attended nine elementary schools from two in Alaska to Alabama State University's Lab School, Jackson School in Hempstead, New York and Hempstead High School. He graduated from Tokyo American High School in 1961 as president of his class and captain of the football team. After a brief stint at Purdue University, Knox joined his family at Tuskegee Institute where his father headed the AFROTC program. He graduated with honors, receiving his B.A. degree in political science in 1967. Knox, who had interned on the Vietnam desk at the Department of State in 1965 as part of the Foreign Affairs Scholars Program, pursued graduate studies at American University.

Knox entered the United States Foreign Service in 1968 serving as third secretary of the United States Embassy in Tokyo, Japan. He also served in the Department of State's Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau. In 1975, Knox earned his M.B.A. from Harvard University and was hired by McKinsey & Company, an international management consulting firm. There, in addition to his other work, he did pro bono projects for the Japan Society, the Ford Foundation and the NAACP. In 1977, Knox joined Phillip Morris becoming vice president of Public Affairs in 1987. Knox served in several capacities at Phillip Morris, including secretary to the Board Committee on Public Affairs and Social Responsibility and chairman of Phil-Pac, the company's political action committee.

Knox is a member of and formerly chairman of the board of the Studio Museum in Harlem. He was a board member of the American Ballet Theatre, Southern Center for International Studies and served as an advisor to the Japan Foundation. Knox is vice chairman of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute; a member emeritus of the Public Affairs Committee of the United States Military Academy; a trustee of the African American

Experience Fund and served on the Business Advisory Council of the United States Information Agency. He has been a director of the Harvard Business School Club of New York, the Independent College Fund of New York; a member of the Dean's Advisory Council of Alabama State University and a governor of the New School University.

Knox and his wife, Gail, divide their time between Stamford, Connecticut and LaJolla, California.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Levi Knox, III was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 29, 2005, in LaJolla, California, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate executive George Levi Knox, III (1943 -) is the former Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Phillip Morris Companies, Inc.

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:

Knox, George Levi, III, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Knox, George Levi, III, 1943---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Philip Morris and Company.

Occupations:

Corporate 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 George Levi Knox, III, March 29, 2005. 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 George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_001, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

George Knox was born on September 6, 1943 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Yvonne Marguerite Wright Knox and George Levi Knox, II. His mother was born on August 27, 1919 in Medford, Massachusetts to Addie Lee Streeter and John Clarence Wright. Wright, a 1906 graduate of Oberlin College, taught at Tuskegee Institute, where he met Streeter, a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, who was on the faculty. Booker T. Washington warned Wright against his courtship of Streeter. Wright and Streeter married and moved on to Tufts University in Medford. The family later relocated to Atlanta, Georgia where Knox's mother spent her adolescence and attended Spelman College. Knox's father was born on December 23, 1916 in Indianapolis, Indiana. Knox, II's grandfather, George Knox, was a successful businessman and author of a family history that details his father's journey from slave to free man. Knox, II, played basketball at Fisk under Tubby Johnson and later became a Tuskegee Airmen.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_002, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

George Knox recounts the role of his father, senior officer George Knox, II, who presided over the Freeman Field Mutiny court-martial. Knox's earliest memory is sitting on the deathbed of his maternal grandfather, John Clarence Wright. Residing on Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio as a young child, Knox watched Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. review troops and heard parades. He remembers the stench of a factory in Panama City, Florida near the home his family shared with HistoryMaker Herbert Carter. Knox first attended school in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. When his father was sent to Anchorage, Alaska in 1951, the Knoxes lived with Knox's paternal grandmother, political activist Susan Craig, in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Knoxes spent two years in Alaska, until Knox's father was assigned to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama. The Knoxes lived in the parsonage where Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. subsequently resided. Knox learned to skate on the porch, which was later bombed by the Ku Klux Klan.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_003, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

George Knox describes his family's ongoing ties to Tuskegee, Alabama, even as the Knoxes moved on to Long Island, New York. Knox's father, George Knox, II was assigned to Mitchel Fields in Hempstead Plains, New York. He compares his experience at the all-black HBCU Laboratory High School at Alabama State College in Montgomery, Alabama to his experiences of seventh and eighth grade at Jackson Main School in Long Island, concluding that transferring frequently developed his political skill. He met Gordon Parks and John Mackey during his freshman year of high school at Hempstead High School. At the end of that year, Knox moved to Tokyo, Japan, where he was senior class president at Narimasu Tokyo American High School. A summer job cleaning the swimming pool at the United States Embassy in Tokyo peaked his interest in the U.S. Foreign Service. Upon graduating in 1961, Knox enrolled at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where he struggled academically when his father required him to study engineering.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_004, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

George Levi Knox, III's father required him to attend Tuskegee Institute after an unsuccessful year at Purdue University. There, Knox met valuable mentors like

Charles Gomillion, Stanley H. Smith and Howard Greenlee; and, after changing his major to political science, enjoyed learning. He was selected for a Foreign Affairs Scholars Program internship with the Department of State in 1965, where he defended Vietnam War policy. At Tuskegee, Knox recalls polarized arguments at Vietnam War teach-ins, and the murders of his friend Sammy Younge, Jr. and other student activists. When Knox was twenty-one years old, his father died. Fearing what would happen to his mother should he be killed, he limited his civil rights involvement. Upon graduating in 1966, Knox began graduate study at American University in Washington, D.C. in preparation for employment with the U.S. Foreign Service. After earning his degree, he passed the U.S. Foreign Service Exam, and enrolled in the U.S. Air Force while awaiting appointment.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_005, TRT: 0:28:41 ?

George Levi Knox, III resigned his U.S. Air Force commission after failing the physical exam, but his U.S. Foreign Service application process was expedited, and he entered service in 1968. He was assigned to Japan, where he corrected the improper Japanese he learned as a teenager in Tokyo, Japan. Knox spent two years at the Embassy of the United States in Tokyo. He was assigned to study language in Yokohama, Japan but rejected the offer. He was sent instead to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Program in Vietnam. As the Vietnam War ended, he was sent to the U.S. Department of State to oversee the Fulbright Fellows Program for East Asia for two years. Unhappy with his U.S. Foreign Service work, Knox matriculated at Harvard Business School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the same class as President George W. Bush. Upon graduation, Knox joined the staff of McKinsey & Company, a New York City consulting firm. He returned to Tokyo to consult for Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_006, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

George Levi Knox, III worked at McKinsey & Company's Japan office from 1976, during the surge of Japanese contributions to the global economy in the 1970s. In the decade since Knox's civil service in Japan, the country came to dominate the electronics, automotive and steel industries. He describes his experience as an African American in Japan and how the Japanese language reflects their class system. After two years, Knox joined the staff of Philip Morris International, Inc., where his uncle, Herbert Wright, was employed for thirty years. He describes the corporation's support of the African American community and its contributions to the National Urban League. Knox details the history of Philip Morris International, Inc., the company's growth in the twentieth century and acquisitions and lawsuits during his time there. Knox worked in international management and in financial relations at Philip Morris International, Inc., then served as vice president from 1988 until retiring in 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with George Levi Knox, III, Section A2005_084_001_007, TRT: 0:14:48 ?

George Levi Knox, III describes his contributions to Philip Morris International, Inc. and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. He reflects upon his time at Philip Morris International, Inc., concluding that the company provided African Americans with a chance at success. He remains hopeful for the future of the African American community although he remarks on the growing disparity between socioeconomic groups. He explains that he would not have done anything differently in his life, because he holds dearly his family, which he

considers to be his legacy. Knox also describes how he would like to be remembered by his loved ones.