

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gerard Peterson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Peterson, Gerard, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson,
Dates:	June 21, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:24:03).
Abstract:	Corporate executive and insurance executive Gerard Peterson (1932 -) worked in various executive roles for Aetna Life and Casualty over a distinguished twenty-three year career. In addition to his work with Aetna, Peterson also served as executive director and COO of the Hartford Civic Center. Peterson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 21, 2005, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_142
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gerard M. Peterson was born on September 10, 1932, in Hartford, Connecticut; he was the second of five children born to Edythe and Rufus Peterson. Peterson attended Hartford public schools, and graduated from Bulkeley High School. From there, Peterson received a B.A. degree in economics from the University of Connecticut.

With Aetna Life and Casualty, Peterson's first position was administrator of

Aetna's Corporate Insurance Division as an assistant secretary at the corporate level, directing sales for field office group insurance representatives. Active in Aetna's commitment to corporate involvement, Peterson was a loaned executive to non-profit organizations. From 1965 to 1966, Peterson then was manager of Plans for Progress, one of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Between 1969 and 1970, Peterson was again on loan as the executive vice-president of the National Alliance of Business, which was created to find jobs for the unemployed. In July 1970, Peterson left Aetna to become assistant dean in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University in California, where he served for three years.

Peterson returned to Aetna in 1973 to become the marketing director of Aetna Public Health Management's Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). From 1975 to 1983, Peterson, as Aetna's Marketing Manager, directed sales representatives and managed national advertising and marketing services. Peterson completed his distinguished twenty-three year career with Aetna Life and Casualty in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1983.

After leaving Aetna, Peterson served as executive director and CEO of the Hartford Civic Center; this multi-purpose facility had a convention venue and one of the largest arenas in New England. During his tenure at the Hartford Civic Center, 18.5 million customers visited the Center while contributing a surplus exceeding \$11,000,000 to the City of Hartford. The Hartford Civic Center received the 1986 Arena of the Year Award from *Performance Magazine* while Peterson himself was recognized as Facility Manager of the Year for major convention centers.

Peterson's contributions to national, regional and local organizations included being director of the Hartford Chamber of Commerce, a council member in the town of Bloomfield, Connecticut, and serving on committees of the United States Golf Association (USGA).

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gerard Peterson was conducted by Robert Hayden on June 21, 2005, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate executive and insurance executive Gerard Peterson (1932 -) worked in various executive roles for Aetna Life and Casualty over a distinguished twenty-three year career. In addition to his work with Aetna, Peterson also served as executive director and COO of the Hartford

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:

Peterson, Gerard, 1932-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Peterson, Gerard, 1932---Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Business consultants--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Hartford Civic Center (Hartford, Conn.)

Aetna Life & Casualty.

Occupations:

Corporate Executive

Insurance 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 Gerard Peterson, June 21, 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 2/5/2020 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 Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_001, TRT: 0:29:35 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson was born on September 10, 1932 in Hartford, Connecticut to Edythe Crosby Peterson and Rufus Peterson. His maternal grandparents, Anna and Benjamin Crosby, moved from Virginia to Hartford. Peterson's maternal grandmother was a renowned chef who published a cookbook in 1926, and his maternal grandfather was caretaker for the family of Dr. Horace Wells, the inventor of anesthesia. Peterson's father was

born in Mathews County, Virginia to Eliza Peterson, a farmer. They moved to Bloomfield, Connecticut when he was five. Peterson's father excelled in sports in high school. Peterson's mother attended Howard University for one year until her marriage. She then worked as a domestic. Peterson's father worked as a handyman until World War II when he was hired by the United Aircraft Corporation. He was a union steward for the International Association of Machinists. Peterson grew up in his maternal grandparents' home. He and his father both moved to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts after their retirement.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Business consultants--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_002, TRT: 0:30:03 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson and his four siblings lived with his maternal grandparents in Hartford, Connecticut after his parents' divorce. His mother worked in New York City and Stamford, Connecticut while his father worked for the United Aircraft Corporation in Hartford. He recalls the diverse, lower middle-class community in his childhood neighborhood. Growing up, he attended Negro League baseball games, caddied at Wethersfield Country Club and worked with his brothers in the tobacco fields during the summer. Peterson's grandparents were very involved at Union Baptist Church in Hartford. He remembers the sounds of streetcars, listening to the radio with his grandfather, and the smell of his grandmother's cooking during the holidays. Peterson recounts his father's move to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts after his retirement, and his siblings' careers. Peterson's three brothers were skilled golfers and two of them served in the U.S. military. Peterson's sister was one of the first nurse practitioners in the U.S.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_003, TRT: 0:30:07 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson attended Dr. James H. Naylor Elementary School and Alfred E. Burr Junior High School in Hartford.

At Morgan Gardner Bulkeley High School, he played in the state tournament as part of the golf team, enjoyed studying math and was inspired by his teachers, Ralph Kierstead and Dr. Melrose. As the only African American in his graduating class, most of his socializing occurred at church and the golf course. He aspired to attend Howard University, but instead chose the University of Connecticut (UConn) in Storrs since it was close to Hartford and inexpensive. Peterson worked in tobacco fields and caddied at the Wethersfield Country Club for professional golfers Dave Campbell and Tommy Armour. During his second year of college, Peterson was drafted into the U.S. Army. He remembers playing golf during his training. The Korean War ended shortly before Peterson was discharged, and he resumed his studies at UConn, majoring in economics. After graduation, Peterson worked at Aetna Life and Casualty Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_004, TRT: 0:30:02 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson served as president of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and worked for WHUS Radio at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. He graduated with his bachelor's degree in economics in 1957. Peterson met his wife, Carole Peterson, through a mutual friend, and the two were married in Hartford, Connecticut. They have two sons, Brian and Bradford Peterson. At Aetna Life and Casualty, Peterson became one of the first computer programmers and system analysts in the country and joined the company's Toastmasters club. Peterson served on the council for the Plans for Progress program under President Lyndon Johnson. He recalls living in Washington, D.C. during the Civil Rights Movement and encountering Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Peterson worked with Vice President Hubert Humphrey's task force for youth motivation before returning to Aetna. He then moved to California to accept the position of assistant dean at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson served as assistant dean at the Stanford

Graduate School of Business, where he mentored African American students and managed an internship program funded by the Merrill Lynch Foundation. Peterson recruited William Kennedy, Sr., A. Barry Rand and others to the business school's summer executive program. He also enjoyed playing at Stanford Golf Course. Peterson reflects upon how his time at Stanford enhanced problem-solving and communication skills that he used throughout his career. After three years, Peterson returned to Aetna Life and Casualty Company to direct their first health maintenance organization. In 1983, Peterson became the executive director at the Hartford Civic Center, an arena and convention center with commercial offices and shops. In 1985, Performance magazine named the civic center arena of the year and Peterson as arena manager of the year. After ten years, Peterson left to assist the National Urban League and spend a year as a project manager for Johnson Controls.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_006, TRT: 0:29:48 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson faced discrimination at Keney Park Golf Course in Hartford, Connecticut. After appealing to City of Hartford, Peterson was admitted to the Keney Men's Club. Soon after, he beat the club's champion in what became Peterson's best game of golf. He reflects upon the impact of golf on his career. Peterson served as president of the Midway Golf Club and New England region vice president of United Golf Association. He describes the state of golf in Hartford, Connecticut in the early 1900s and the small number of African American players. At the time of the interview, Peterson volunteered for the United States Golf Association, was a chairman at the Mink Meadows Golf Club, and taught golf lessons at a senior center on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Peterson recalls playing golf with Earl Woods and meeting his son, Tiger Woods. He gives advice to young golfers and describes his work with several nonprofit organizations, including the American Red Cross and various Hartford hospitals.

Video Oral History Interview with Gerard Peterson, Section
A2005_142_001_007, TRT: 0:24:58 2005/06/21

Gerard Peterson coached midget football in Hartford, Connecticut. He remembers some of his players and their eventual successes and professional achievements. Peterson reflects upon his life and speculates about his plans for the future. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the tape by narrating his photographs.