

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mary "Betty" Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Mary Elizabeth, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown,
Dates:	January 26, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:47:22).
Abstract:	Civic leader Mary "Betty" Brown (1932 -) is a noted style maven in Chicago, serving as a wardrobe and makeup consultant to Miss Illinois in the Miss America pageant for four years. She was also named one of the One Hundred Women of Destiny selected by Marilyn Miglin & Associates. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 26, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_008
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Mary Elizabeth “Betty” Brown has been a steady and stylish presence in Chicago and in Elgin, Illinois for more than thirty-five years. From her column, "Steppin Out with Betty Brown" in the *Elgin Courier* to serving as the first black nurse at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Joliet, Illinois, Brown has always been a trailblazer.

Born in Chicago, but raised in Schaumburg, Illinois on the estate of her father's employer, Brown and her two brothers had to learn to play quietly because the employer did not know his chauffeur's children lived in his coach house. Brown's mother also worked as the family cook, and after saving enough money, Theron and Margaret Stephens moved their children to Elgin, Illinois. A multi-talented student of voice and dance, Brown was well known at her church, St. James AME Church, Wing Elementary and Elgin High School, but her mother discouraged her from pursuing singing.

Brown's mother was a nurse's aide at Sherman Hospital and Brown decided to apply to the nursing program there, but she was promptly rejected. Disheartened, Brown approached St. Joseph's Hospital and became the first black nursing student in Joliet, Illinois. Not long after graduating, she married her sweetheart, Floyd Brown, who was just beginning to make a name for himself in Chicago radio. Brown served as a wardrobe and makeup consultant to Miss Illinois in the Miss America pageant for four years. She was named one of the One Hundred Women of Destiny selected by Marilyn Miglin & Associates. Brown received numerous awards for her civic work, including HI CHIC Award in Fashion, the Altrusa Outstanding Woman of the Year, Outstanding Woman in Advertising and the YMCA Margaret Henry Award.

Brown and her husband, Floyd Brown, live in Elgin, Illinois. They have two children and several grandchildren. Their son, F. Keith Brown, was the first black judge in the Northwestern Illinois suburbs. Their daughter, Diane Douglas, works in human resources.

Mary "Betty" Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 26, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mary "Betty" Brown was conducted by Tracey Lewis on January 26, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civic leader Mary "Betty" Brown (1932 -) is a noted style maven in Chicago, serving as a wardrobe and makeup consultant to Miss Illinois in the Miss America pageant for four years. She was also named one of the One Hundred Women of Destiny selected by Marilyn Miglin & Associates.

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:

Brown, Mary Elizabeth, 1932-

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Mary Elizabeth, 1932- --Interviews

Socialites--Illionois--Chicago-Interviews

Chicago (Ill.)--Social life and customs

African American nurses--Interviews

African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Mary "Betty" Brown, January 26, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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 Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006_008_001_001, TRT: 0:28:25 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown was born on March 7, 1932 in Chicago, Illinois to Margaret Brown Stephens and Thermon Stephens, Sr. Brown's mother was born in Baltimore, Maryland and sang in the church choir. Brown's father was born in Corinth, Mississippi to a large family. Brown's family moved to Schaumburg, Illinois where her father chauffeured and her mother cooked for Attorney Everett Jennings. When Brown was six years old, her family moved to Elgin, Illinois where her father worked as a garbage man. She attended Abby C. Wing School, which was integrated but predominately white. Aspiring to be a singer, Brown studied voice and piano. She joined the Unisingers and another singing group that won state competitions. During the summers, she attended bible school. After graduating from Elgin High School in 1951, Brown entered the nursing program at Saint Joseph Hospital in Joliet, Illinois, becoming their first black student. Brown describes her two brothers, her earliest memories, and her mother's cooking.

African American nurses--Illinois.

Nursing schools--Students--Illinois.

African Americans--Illinois--Chicago.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006_008_001_002, TRT: 0:29:31 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown recalls visiting her family in Chicago, Illinois as a child. Brown and her siblings lived on the estate of Everett Jennings, their father's employer, in secret until her parents saved enough money to move to Elgin,, Illinois. Brown continued training as a nurse at a psychiatric hospital in Fergus Falls, Minnesota after completing three years of training at Saint Joseph Hospital in Joliet, Illinois. After graduating, Brown treated tuberculosis patients in Chicago. In 1951, Brown met Floyd Brown when he came to Elgin to work as a radio engineer. They married at First Methodist Church in Elgin, and Brown's husband became an announcer for WRMN Radio. Their son, Judge F. Keith Brown, was born in 1956, and their daughter, Diane Brown, was born in 1958. To care for her children, Brown became a homemaker and worked part-time as a private duty nurse. She was also the president of the Elgin PTA and organized fundraisers for the Elgin Junior Services Board, becoming its first African American member.

African American nurses.

African American couples--Illinois.

African American radio broadcasters--Illinois.

African American families--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006_008_001_003, TRT: 0:28:36 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown describes her experiences with racism while working at a psychiatric hospital. Known for her style, Brown dressed in the same fashion as President Lyndon B. Johnson's wife. Brown was a stylist and consultant to Miss America and Miss Illinois contestants like Ruth Booker, the first black Miss

Illinois. Through the pageants, Brown became acquainted with designers like Yolanda Lorente. Brown also became a member of Fashion Group International and One Hundred Women of Destiny with Marilyn Miglin. Brown taught etiquette classes in Aurora, and she and her husband started an editorial magazine. Brown was a freelance writer for NorthShore magazine before becoming a columnist at The Courier News. As a licensing investigator for the Illinois Department of Public Health, Brown reviewed nursing homes' credentials and standards. Brown recalls cases of child abuse she saw as a pediatric nurse in the 1970s. Brown also explains why she prefers to live in Elgin, Illinois.

African American nurses.

Publishers and publishing--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Beauty pageants--United States.

Chicago (Ill.)--Social life and customs.

African American journalists--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary "Betty" Brown, Section A2006_008_001_004, TRT: 0:20:50 2006/01/26

Mary "Betty" Brown talks about maintaining her own identity outside of being a wife and mother. Brown describes her fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration. At the time of the interview, she was still writing her column for The Courier News, Steppin' Out with Betty Brown. When asked about fellow writers, Brown shares her admiration for Stella Foster and Lisa Lenoir of the Chicago Sun-Times. Brown also describes her grandchildren; her close-knit community in Elgin, Illinois; and how she would like to be remembered. She considers how she has shared her musical talent and cooking skills with her children. She reflects upon her legacy and concludes the interview by remembering the life lessons she learned from her mother and grandmother.

African American journalists.

African American families--Illinois.

African American women--Social conditions.