

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James O. Webb

---

## 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>	Webb, James O., 1931-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 25, 2007, February 12, 2007 and March 8, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:06:14).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Insurance executive and mayor James O. Webb (1931 - ) served as Chairman, President and CEO of Dental Network of America, and as mayor of Glencoe, Illinois for two consecutive terms. Webb was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2007, February 12, 2007 and March 8, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_061
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Glencoe, Illinois Mayor and insurance industry veteran James O. Webb, Jr. was born on November 25, 1931 in Cleveland, Ohio to Bessie Eubanks and James O. Webb, Sr. Webb attended Miles Standish, Empire and Glenville high schools in Cleveland, then graduated from Morehouse College in 1953 with his B.A. degree. He served two years active duty in the Korean War and spent six years as a member of the U.S. Army Reserve.

In 1954, Webb married Frankie L. Lowe in Atlanta, Georgia, where the couple

lived across the street from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Webb graduated from the University of Michigan in 1957 with a M.B.A. in actuarial science in 1957, the same year as the birth of his daughter, Pamela. In 1957, Webb worked as a Management Trainee Actuarial Assistant for Mutual of New York. Six years later, he joined Supreme Life Insurance, the first African American-owned and operated insurance company in the northern United States.

Webb moved to Illinois Blue Cross & Blue Shield in 1966 and held numerous positions. He began as an assistant actuary, and was promoted to Assistant VP-Product Development, where he helped to develop a new product line. Webb also designed the first Illinois HMO, as well as a national think tank for Blue Cross & Blue Shield executives called the Business Development Institute.

In 1967, Webb's family moved to Glencoe, Illinois, a village in Cook County and became one of the few African American families to live in that area. Webb became treasurer for the American Academy of Actuaries in 1977, and in 1984, Webb joined the Dental Network of America, where he served as Chairman, President and CEO. There, he helped to guide the organization's growth into the leading managed dental care company in the United States.

In 1993, after being encouraged to run for public office, Webb was elected mayor of Glencoe, Illinois, where he would remain for two full four-year terms. He successfully tripled the village's tax income while overseeing certain land acquisition projects. Webb also helped enact ordinances for tree preservation and a teenage smoking ban. He left Dental Network of America in 1994 and became Director of Harris Bank, where he would remain until 2001. That same year, Webb retired from his position as Mayor of Glencoe and moved to North Carolina, where he lives with his daughter. In 2006, Webb became a member of the Durham, North Carolina Arts Council Board of Trustees.

Webb was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 12, 2007.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James O. Webb was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Sasha Daltonn on April 25, 2007, February 12, 2007 and March 8, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Insurance executive and mayor James O. Webb (1931 - ) served as Chairman, President and CEO of Dental Network of America, and as mayor of Glencoe, Illinois for two consecutive terms.

---

# 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:

Webb, James O., 1931-

Dalton, Sasha (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Webb, James O., 1931---Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Glencoe (Ill.)

---

## **Occupations:**

Insurance Executive

---

Mayor

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

BusinessMakers|PoliticalMakers

---

## **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 James O. Webb, April 25, 2007, February 12, 2007 and March 8, 2007. 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 James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/02/12

James O. Webb was born on November 25, 1931 in Cleveland, Ohio to Bessie Eubanks Webb and James O. Webb, Sr. His maternal grandparents, Fannie Eubanks and Richard Eubanks, raised their family in Whitesville, Georgia. His mother studied at Spelman Seminary, and later became the principal of a school in the South. Webb's paternal grandmother, Sarah Brown, was a domestic in Roanoke, Virginia; and his paternal grandfather was her white employer. Webb's father attended the Agricultural and Mechanical College of North Carolina, and then moved to Columbus, Ohio, where he founded a coal and feed business and purchased several apartment buildings. He became a millionaire, until the Great Depression left him bankrupt. After Webb's parents married, they moved to Cleveland, where his father worked as a store manager

at Fisher Foods, Inc. Webb grew up reading medical books, and aspired to become a surgeon; but was discouraged by his high school guidance counsellor, who suggested that he work as a clothes presser.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:50 2007/02/12

James O. Webb grew up in public housing in a majority-black neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. He began his education at Case-Woodland Elementary School, where he quickly learned to read at an advanced level. Encouraged by his teacher, Ms. Latimer, he impressed his school principal by reciting a passage from 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' and was allowed to skip the third grade. Later, Webb's family moved to the affluent, predominantly white Glenville neighborhood, where he befriended both white and black children. He enrolled at Miles Standish Elementary School, and was influenced by the discipline of the principal, Mrs. Carlson. He went on to attend Empire Junior High School, where he excelled in science and won a game design contest. After graduating to Glenville High School, Webb was ostracized by his white friends, at their parents' urging. He graduated in 1949; and, with his mother's encouragement, matriculated to the historically black Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_003, TRT: 0:27:10 2007/02/12

James O. Webb matriculated at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1949. He travelled to the school by train; and, upon asking a white porter about his baggage, experienced racial discrimination in the South for the first time. To pay for his education, he took a position at a cafeteria in downtown Atlanta, where he was chastised for speaking to a white female coworker. After these incidents, Dean Brailsford Reese Brazeal confined Webb to the campus for six months, for his own safety. Later in his freshman year, Webb made the honor roll, and was inspired by the college president, Dr. Benjamin Mays. He focused on his premedical studies, and was encouraged by his math professor, Claude Dansby. Webb later switched his major to business. During his sophomore year, he joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, and befriended

fraternity brothers T.M. Alexander, Jr., Dr. Louis Sullivan and William Holmes Borders, Jr. Webb also recalls his experiences on public transit in Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/02/12

James O. Webb was a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia from 1949 to 1953. During his first semester, he was confined to the campus for his own safety, as his unfamiliarity with the culture of the segregated South exposed him to the danger of white reprisals. Webb was influenced by the wisdom of Morehouse College President Dr. Benjamin Mays, and the discipline of the Dean Brailsford Reese Brazeal. As a sophomore, he pledged Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, where his brothers included T.M. Alexander, Jr., the son of Atlanta's prominent civic leader T.M. Alexander, Sr. During his senior year, Webb switched his major from pre-medicine to business, and completed extra credit hours to compensate for his absence at chapel services. He had been told by Dean Brazeal that he would not graduate on time; but excelled during his final semester, and received a degree from Morehouse College in 1953.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/02/12

James O. Webb was a junior at Morehouse College when he met his wife, Frankie Lowe Webb, who was a first year student at Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia. His wife's family were friends and neighbors of the King family, and belonged to the congregation of the Ebenezer Baptist Church. In 1953, Webb graduated from Morehouse College, and returned home to Cleveland, Ohio, where he worked at the Dunbar Life Insurance Company. The firm was owned by Webb's uncle, D.C. Chandler, who encouraged him to pursue a career in actuarial science. Webb was drafted into the U.S. Army, and completed his training at Fort Knox in Kentucky. He proposed to his wife while on leave, and they were married by Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, with Alberta Williams King, Alfred Daniel Williams King, Christine King Farris and Webb's college roommate, George Key, in attendance. After the wedding, Webb was

deployed to Alaska. He also remembers meeting Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/02/12

James O. Webb was stationed in Anchorage, Alaska while serving in the U.S. military. He was discharged in 1955, and enrolled in the M.B.A. program at the University of Michigan, where he studied actuarial science. He was one of twelve students in his class, and the only African American. The campus was visited by numerous companies that were looking to recruit actuarial staff; but, due to Webb's race, Professor Allen L. Mayerson warned him against applying to any firm outside of New York City. Curious to test the advice, he interviewed with an insurance company based in Alabama, and never received a response. Upon graduating in 1957, Webb joined the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York, where he participated in the actuarial training program. After five years, he was offered the role of vice president and actuary at the Supreme Life Insurance Company of America under President Earl B. Dickerson. Webb remained there until 1966, when he was hired at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/02/12

James O. Webb moved with his family in 1962 to the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. In 1966, he purchased a home in the majority-white village of Glencoe, Illinois. He was also hired as an actuary at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois; where, after two years, he was promoted to the assistant vice presidency of product development. During this time, Webb served as the treasurer and first black board member of the American Academy of Actuaries. He was active on the Glencoe Human Relations Committee, where he advocated for the passage of an open housing ordinance; and went on to serve as the committee's vice president, and then president. In addition, he organized Glencoe's black parents, and held a conference with school officials about classroom integration. Webb was recruited to the school board in 1971, and was elected as the board

president in 1976. He became the mayor of Glencoe in 1993. Webb also talks about the International Association of Black Actuaries.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section A2007\_061\_002\_008, TRT: 0:30:40 2007/03/08

James O. Webb joined Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois in 1966. He was mentored by the CEO of the company, actuary Simeon Martin Hickman; and became one of the first black officers of a major corporation in Chicago when he was promoted to treasurer in 1969. In this role, Webb managed the company's \$2 billion cash flow. He remained in the treasurer position until 1971, when Chicago's elite white business community succeeded in pushing him out of the role. Webb was later promoted to senior vice president of strategic planning and business development. In that capacity, he founded the company's business development institute, and helped create the nation's first prepaid prescription drug programs. In 1983, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association acquired the Dental Network of America, LLC. Webb chaired the group in charge of the acquisition process, and served as interim CEO. He formally took office as the CEO of the Dental Network of America, LLC in 1984. Webb also narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section A2007\_061\_002\_009, TRT: 0:30:20 2007/03/08

James O. Webb helped found the Chicago Caucus in 1972, alongside African American leaders like activist Timuel Black and government administrator Josie Childs. Created to combat discrimination in Corporate America, the organization advocated for African Americans' inclusion on corporate and civic boards; held educational seminars on board membership; and created the Golden Gavel Award for outstanding board service. In 1981, the caucus commissioned artist Ramon B. Price to create a sculpture to commemorate the election of three black U.S. Congressmen from Illinois: Harold Washington, Cardiss Collins and Gus Savage. The piece was featured in the DuSable Museum of African American History. Later, Webb joined the Chicago Forum, which hosted opportunities for black and white executives to talk about

racial issues. In 1984, Webb became the CEO of the Dental Network of America, LLC, where he targeted customers of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, and grew the company's annual profits to \$70 million.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section A2007\_061\_002\_010, TRT: 0:31:08 2007/03/08

James O. Webb's family became the first African American household on their street in Glencoe, Illinois in 1967. While they moved into their new home, the area was guarded by the Glencoe Human Relations Committee. Webb joined the committee, and was later elected as its president. In 1968, Webb was recruited by activist Eleanor Petersen to chair the Home Investments Fund, which encouraged African Americans to integrate predominantly white suburbs in Illinois by providing second mortgages. As chair, he held classes for new homeowners, and handled discrimination cases with the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities. In the mid-1970s, Webb joined Johnson Publishing Company's Lerone Bennett and City of Chicago cultural affairs commissioner Joan Small to found the Chicago Black United Fund, which channeled funds for black organizations through the United Way Worldwide. In 1993, Webb was invited to run for mayor of Glencoe, and accepted after receiving encouragement from his daughters.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section A2007\_061\_003\_011, TRT: 0:30:19 2007/04/25

James O. Webb encountered racial discrimination while searching for a home in the majority-white North Shore of Chicago, Illinois. His white realtor suggested that he purchase a house near her own home in Glencoe, Illinois, where he moved with his family in 1967. He and his wife, Frankie Lowe Webb, joined the Glencoe Human Relations Committee, and helped pass an open housing ordinance. After being elected as the committee's vice president, Webb created a newsletter; organized festivals in the community; and joined with the other African American parents to advocate for the acknowledgement of black identity at the local high school. In 1971, Webb was elected to the school board, where he closed a school due to low enrollment. He went on to serve as the school board

president from 1976 to 1978. In 1993, Webb was recruited by village manager Robert Morris and village president Roland Calhoun to run for mayor of Glencoe, at a time when the community was divided over a downtown development proposal.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_003\_012, TRT: 0:29:31 2007/04/25

James O. Webb was elected as the mayor of Glencoe, Illinois in 1993; and, one year later, retired as CEO of the Dental Network of America, LLC. During his mayoral tenure, he negotiated with Cook County Board President John H. Stroger, Jr. to purchase land adjacent to Glencoe, which quadrupled the village's tax base. In honor of Glencoe's 125th anniversary in 1994, Webb organized a yearlong celebration, including an ecumenical Thanksgiving church service and a banquet at the Chicago Botanic Garden. He joined the board of the Harris Bank Glencoe-Northbrook, and was later recruited by businessman Daryl F. Grisham to the board of Harris Trust and Savings Bank in downtown Chicago, Illinois. At the time, he and Grisham were the only African Americans on the board, where Webb later served as director. Webb was elected to a second mayoral term in 1997; and served until 2001, when he declined to run for a third term. Webb reflects upon Glencoe's economic growth, and the racial progress in Corporate America.

Video Oral History Interview with James O. Webb, Section  
A2007\_061\_003\_013, TRT: 0:11:56 2007/04/25

James O. Webb talks about the opportunities for African Americans in Corporate America. He then describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.