Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®

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Creator: Lester N. Coney

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lester N. Coney,

Dates: February 15, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:36:55).

Abstract: Community leader and corporate executive Lester N. Coney (1958 - ) works for Mesirow Financial and is the first African American Chairman of the Board of Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Coney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_070

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®


In 1981, Coney taught at Potential Elementary School on Chicago’s Southside. Resigning in 1982 to accept a position as Account Representative with Travelers Insurance, Coney remained with the insurance company through the merger with United Health Care in 1994. Coney served as Director of Key Accounts and National Sales Director. In 1996, Coney joined AON Insurance as Senior Managing Director and became active in Chicago’s civic community. In 2006, Coney accepted the position of Executive Vice President and Senior Managing Director for Mesirow Financial.

Coney was the first African American to serve as Chairman of Chicago’s Goodman Theater. He also served as Vice Chairman of the DuSable Museum of African American History and Founding Chair of the Congo Square Theater’s Board and Chairman of City Year Chicago. Additionally, Coney served as a Trustee at Roosevelt University, the Kohl’s Children’s Museum, the Athletes Against Drugs organization, and as the Co-Chair of the Democratic National Committee. Coney’s honors include the Leadership In Arts Award from the Business Council of Chicago in 2006; the Community Service Award by the 100 Black Men in 2005; and "Crain’s Chicago Business" Top 50 Minorities in Business in 2004. Lester N. Coney resides in Chicago’s West Loop.

Lester Coney was interviewed by The HistoryMakerson February 15, 2007.
Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lester N. Coney was conducted by Sasha Daltonn on February 15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Community leader and corporate executive Lester N. Coney (1958 - ) works for Mesirow Financial and is the first African American Chairman of the Board of Chicago's Goodman Theatre.

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:

Coney, Lester

Daltonn, Sasha (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Lester N. Coney--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:
HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/15/2011 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, February 15, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Lester N. Coney, Section A2007_070_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 2007/02/15

Lester Coney discusses his family background and childhood memories. Coney grew up in a house in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with both his parents. North Philadelphia was a predominately African American community. The family lived on Florence Street, in the heart of the city, until Coney was two or three years old. Coney's family moved with his maternal grandparents’ house to
help his paralyzed grandfather in South Philadelphia. Coney knows very little about his family background and recalls spending most of his time at the Nice Town Boys and Girls Club.

African American families--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
African American children--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
African American neighborhoods--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia

Video Oral History Interview with Lester N. Coney, Section A2007_070_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/02/15

Lester Coney discusses his experiences at the Nice Town Boys and Girls Club, which was a big part of the community. Coney talks about his mother who taught at the elementary school he attended. He also discusses attending Glover Cleveland Elementary School, Harding Junior high school and Frankfurt high school and the activities he was involved in, including basketball. He describes himself as an all around good student, but not great at anything in particular. Coney remembers Harding Junior High School because it was the first time he attended school outside of his neighborhood. Coney discusses the education of his family and his inspiration to further his education. Coney shares his experiences attending George Williams College in Chicago, Illinois. Coney talks about his wife, Dawn, and the role religion played in his family’s life.

Education, Primary--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
George Williams College (Downers Grove, Ill.)
African American teachers--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia
Boys and Girls Clubs of America--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia

Video Oral History Interview with Lester N. Coney, Section A2007_070_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/02/15

Lester Coney discusses meeting his wife, Dawn, a smart and articulate cheerleader. They were engaged their junior year at George Williams College and married in 1982, after Coney graduated. He talks about their married life. Coney also discusses his love of basketball. He mentions high school teammates who became NBA players, including Jack Sigma. Coney remembers going to formal dinners with Dawn and her family. Dawn and her family exposed Coney to new environments and inspired Coney to travel as much as possible. Dawn and Coney later divorced, which Coney found to be hard for him. Coney talks about his life after the divorce.

African Americans--Marriage
Education, Higher--Illinois
George Williams University (Downers Grove, Ill.)
African American couples

Video Oral History Interview with Lester N. Coney, Section A2007_070_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 2007/02/15

Lester Coney talks about his experiences as a teacher at the Potential School, tutoring children of well known families, and working at Marshall Field's where someone suggested that he be an insurance agent. When Coney was hired at Travelers Insurance in Hartford, Connecticut, he was ecstatic about his new job with a $16,000 salary, and company car. He emphasizes the success of Travelers' training program. The training class consisted of thirty students of whom only four were black. Coney stayed with Travelers for sixteen years and traveled all over the country with his wife, Dawn. He discusses a missed opportunity to sit with Sandy Weill, the CEO of Citibank, who purchased Travelers. Coney also discusses starting the first black fraternity at George
Lester Coney discusses his employment at Travelers Insurance. He also discusses Mesirow Financial agency, the President of Mesirow, Jim Tyree, and the growth of the agency. He shares his experiences while employed with Mesirow and AON Insurance agencies. Coney worked as a Senior Managing Director of AON and was responsible for bringing Boeing and Excelon to AON. After ten years with AON, Coney took a position with Mesirow Insurance. He discusses meeting Peter Bynoe. Coney conveys his enjoyment of theaters and shares his experiences when starting the Congo Square Theatre with Roxanne Ward and others and the success of the theater. Coney became the Chairman of the Goodman Theatre, becoming the first African American to chair a major cultural institution in Chicago. Coney mentions the awards he has received. Coney enjoys working at Mesirow because he is able to do business with friends and many minority companies.

Lester Coney shares and describes personal photographs.