

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ronald Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Ronald DeWayne, 1953-2008
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown,
Dates:	March 28, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:06:10).
Abstract:	Investment chief executive Ronald Brown (1953 - 2008) was the President and CEO of Sales Technology for Dun and Bradstreet Corporation, served on the board of directors of Atlanta Life Financial Group, and was appointed President and CEO of Atlanta Life Financial Group. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 28, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_115
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Atlanta Life Financial Group President and CEO Ronald DeWayne Brown was born on August 1, 1953 in Cleveland, Ohio to Betty Williams and Clifford Brown. He was raised in New York City by his mother and stepfather, Gifford Williams. Brown was a graduate of Morehouse College with a B.A. degree in political science and economics. He was also a graduate of the Financial Management Program at Columbia University School of Business.

Brown began his career in 1977 working with Equifax in Atlanta, Georgia where he held various managerial positions. In 1988, he began his tenure with the Dun and Bradstreet Corporation and its successor companies, becoming the President and CEO of Sales Technology. There, he developed sales force automation software for the consumer packaged goods and pharmaceutical industries and was instrumental in taking the company public. In 1998, Brown became the CEO of Strategic Technologies, a premier market research firm with operations in 90 countries. By 2000, Brown was the President of Synavant, a global leader in customer relationship management software and solutions for the pharmaceutical industry.

In 2001, Brown joined the board of directors of Atlanta Life and became the CEO and managing partner of Variant Group. Charles E. Cornelius, President of Atlanta Life Financial Group retired, and in 2004, Brown was appointed the sixth President and CEO in the 100 year history of Atlanta Life Financial. He was also the Chairman of Jackson Securities, a full service investment bank, now affiliated with Atlanta Life, founded by the late mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson.

Brown served as a business mentor at Morehouse College and the Georgia 100 Mentor program. He was the 2005 recipient of the Rainbow PUSH Wall Street Project Entrepreneur of the Year Award and the Business Advisor of the Year Award. He was also a member of the 100 Black Men of Atlanta Executive Committee and the Rotary Club of Atlanta.

Brown passed away on April 28, 2008 at age 54.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ronald Brown was conducted by Denise Gines on March 28, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Investment chief executive Ronald Brown (1953 - 2008) was the President and CEO of Sales Technology for Dun and Bradstreet Corporation, served on the board of directors of Atlanta Life Financial Group, and was appointed President and CEO of Atlanta Life Financial Group.

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, Ronald DeWayne, 1953-2008

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Ronald DeWayne, 1953-2008--Interviews

Organizations:

Occupations:

Investment Chief 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 Ronald Brown, March 28, 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 Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown was born on August 1, 1953 in Cleveland, Ohio to Bettye Belton Williams and Clifford Brown. His maternal grandparents, James Belton, Sr. and Rebecca Belton, raised his mother and her brother in Bessemer, Alabama. His grandfather worked in the mines in Birmingham, Alabama, and hid his daughter's college attendance from his supervisor, fearing that he would be prevented from working to pay for her tuition. Brown's mother went on to graduate with a teaching degree from Miles College. Brown's father was born to Leola Brown and Otis Brown in Brighton, Alabama. His family was poor, and he worked as a caddy before becoming a professional golfer and competing on the PGA Tour in the 1960s. Brown's parents met and married in Alabama, and then moved to Cleveland, where they eventually divorced. Brown's mother returned to her parents' home in Alabama; and, while she attended graduate school, Brown was raised by his grandparents. He moved to New York City with his mother during the third grade.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown's parents, Bettye Belton Williams and Clifford Brown, moved to Cleveland, Ohio for his father's golf career. Five years later, Brown and his mother returned to Bessemer, Alabama, where he lived with his maternal grandparents, James Belton, Sr. and Rebecca Belton. Brown began kindergarten one year early, and was nurtured by his teachers at George Washington Carver Elementary School. He spent a summer with his mother in Brooklyn, New York, where she moved to work in the

public schools. Around this time, Brown's mother met chauffeur service owner Gifford Williams; and, after they married, Brown moved with them to Manhattan, where his siblings, Roderick Williams and Cliffye Williams Johnson, were born. Brown enrolled at New York City's P.S. 129 John H. Finley School, where he was placed in a low performing class. At his mother's insistence, he was tested and reassigned; and went on to attend J.H.S. 139 Frederick Douglass School, where he was influenced by the honors program teacher, H.W. Brendle.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown moved to New York City to live with his mother, schoolteacher Bettye Belton Williams. She was active in local politics, and supported New York Assemblyman Herman "Denny" Farrell during his early career. Brown attended J.H.S. 139, Frederick Douglass School in Harlem, where he was mentored by teacher H.W. Brendle. He also played baseball and basketball, and served as student government president. Following two student suicides at the neighborhood high school, Brown commuted to Lower Manhattan to attend Seward Park High School, where he became involved in social activism. He protested against the Vietnam War with his classmates, and had conversations with his white friends about the controversies of the time. Brown was also influenced by the city's African American cultural figures, including Black Muslims like Muhammad Ali and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. He attended the Convent Avenue Baptist Church with his family, and recalls mourning the death of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_004, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown's mother, Bettye Belton Williams, encouraged him to attend the historically black Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he matriculated in 1971. At the school, Brown made many close friends, including religion professor Robert Franklin and Olympic hurdler Edwin Moses. He was also influenced by political science professor Edward Buchanan Williams, who encouraged independent thought and self-respect. Brown

met his wife, Deborah Peyton Brown, through his college roommate, Rufus Baker. During school, Brown obtained a position in the computer operations department of the First Atlanta Bank, N.A.; and, upon graduating in 1975, began working there full time. In 1977, Brown joined the information technology department at Equifax, Inc. He remained at the company for eleven years, and eventually became the first African American head of the department. He went on to work in salesforce automation at Sales Technologies, Inc. Brown also describes the political climate of the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_005, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown was head of the information technology department at Equifax, Inc. when he was recruited to join Sales Technologies, Inc., a small software company in Atlanta, Georgia. As the firm expanded, it came to specialize in the healthcare industry, and Brown was promoted to head of the information technology department. After a financially difficult year, the company was acquired by the Dun and Bradstreet Corporation, who appointed Brown as Sales Technologies, Inc.'s president and CEO. The company soon became profitable, and made its initial public offering. Brown learned to court investors, and began conducting international business, including overseas meetings with the other subsidiaries of the Dun and Bradstreet Corporation. After Sales Technologies, Inc. went through a spinoff and acquired its major competitor, Brown conducted its initial public offering as an independent firm, under the name of Synavant, Inc. During this time, Brown had two sons, Jarrod Brown and Jordan Brown

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_006, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown joined the board of the Atlanta Life Financial Group after meeting Chairman William A. Clement, Jr. At this point in the interview, he describes the history of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, which was founded in 1905 by former slave and barbershop entrepreneur Alonzo Franklin Herndon. A member of the Niagara Movement, Herndon's legacy of activism

influenced the company's support for later civil rights leaders like Jesse Hill. In 2004, Brown was named the president and CEO of the Atlanta Life Financial Group. He continued the work of his predecessor to improve the firm's asset management capabilities, and developed a partnership with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Brown also emphasized the importance of minority financial education. He belonged to 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Inc.; as well as the boards of Philander Smith College, Georgia Power Company and Emory Healthcare, Inc. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Brown, Section
A2007_115_001_007, TRT: 0:14:30 2007/03/28

Ronald Brown reflects upon his life and legacy. He also shares a message to future generations, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.