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

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Ronald McNeil

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil,

Dates: April 24, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:57:57).

Abstract: Insurance executive Ronald McNeil (1952 - ) was senior vice president of Allstate Insurance Company and is the co-founder of the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc. McNeil was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_160

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired insurance executive Ronald Dean McNeil was born on November 4, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to Dorothy and Elijah McNeil, who both emphasized the importance of strong faith, personal accountability and education. While attending Wayne State University where he studied finance and business economics, McNeil answered newly elected Mayor Coleman Young’s call for more African Americans to join the Detroit Police Department.

After earning his degree in finance from Wayne State, McNeil joined the Allstate Insurance Corporation. He is well known and highly respected throughout the insurance industry and is considered by many to be an industry trailblazer. McNeil was the first and only black officer in finance at Allstate. He was elected to four senior management team positions, served as chairman of two Allstate subsidiaries and was also president of three local Allstate companies. McNeil’s vision and innovation is reflected in his major accomplishments, which include: 1) the Neighborhood Partnership Program—a program which redefined and improved Allstate’s relationship with urban communities; 2) the Product Operations organization which changed the way the company priced, underwrote and delivered products to the market place and is the foundation of Allstate’s multi-access business model; and 3) Allstate’s first integrated distribution organization where he completely reorganized all aspects of the agency value proposition by channel.

In March, 2007, McNeil retired from Allstate after thirty-one distinguished years of service. At retirement, he was senior vice president of Protection Distribution and a member of Allstate’s senior management team with fiscal and leadership responsibilities totaling $30 billion and 70,000 employees, making him the industry’s first African American to attain such status. McNeil was personally responsible for the recruitment and/or development of more than a quarter of the most senior leadership group.
In retirement, McNeil and his wife, Regina, focus their time and efforts on The Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc., a private, not-for-profit foundation with a focus on providing educational scholarships.

Ronald McNeil was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ronald McNeil was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Insurance executive Ronald McNeil (1952 - ) was senior vice president of Allstate Insurance Company and is the co-founder of the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc.

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:

McNeil, Ronald
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ronald McNeil--Interviews.
African American executives--Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Allstate Insurance Company.

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/17/2011 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, April 24, 2007

Ronald McNeil slates the interview. McNeil discusses his maternal and paternal family’s history. He was born on November 4, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to Dorothy and Elijah McNeil. Dorothy was born in Bath, South Carolina in 1929. However, she moved to Detroit with her mother, Maggie Cole, who was in search of better work and social conditions. She worked for the Department of Social Services in Detroit. McNeil’s father, Elijah Livingston McNeil, was born in Valdosta, Georgia in approximately 1918. Elijah migrated north to join his brothers in Detroit, all of whom were looking for better opportunities. Though he only had a sixth grade education, Elijah was McNeil’s role model and encouraged his sons to be strong men and to take care of their families. McNeil elaborates on his father’s disdain for the South, recalling the story of Elijah being attacked by four white boys and having to sit in the balcony at the movie theater. He goes on to talk about his maternal family’s gradual move back to the South as Detroit evolves into a less desirable place to live. His father, however, refuses to return to the South due its history of racism. As parents, Maggie and Elijah, were strict and had high expectations. They divorced when McNeil was fourteen years old. His mother has since remarried.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.
Migration--Internal--United States.
African American fathers--Michigan--Detroit.
Fathers and sons.
Racism--Georgia--Valdosta.
Racism--Southern States.
Divorced parents--Michigan--Detroit.
African American parents--Michigan--Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section A2007_160_001_002, TRT: 0:29:43
2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil describes growing up in Detroit, Michigan during its economic boom and his decision to join the Detroit Police department. When his parents divorced, McNeil spent a lot of time with his father, who taught him how to conduct himself as a man. During high school, McNeil was arrested for carrying a knife, an experience that encouraged him to stay out of trouble. McNeil joined the Detroit Police department while he was a college student at Wayne State University. He was an officer under the tutelage of Coleman Young, who had initiated a campaign to attract more African American police officers to the force. Young wanted the department to reflect the racial make-up of the communities in their jurisdiction. McNeil goes on to discuss the racial issues with the police department—noting the racial tension among the white and black cops. He also mentions how some white officers mistreated their black arrestees.

African American children--Social life and customs--Michigan--Detroit.
Detroit (Mich.)--Economic conditions--20th century.
Detroit (Mich.). Police Dept.
African American fathers--Michigan--Detroit.
Fathers and sons--Michigan--Detroit.
African American college students--Michigan--Detroit.
Wayne State University.
Young, Coleman A.
African American police--Michigan--Detroit.
Ronald McNeil continues to describe his experiences as a Detroit police officer. Bill Downing and Sam Williams, two African American policemen, mentored McNeil during his tenure with the Detroit Police Department. As an officer, McNeil enjoyed serving the community and states that he learned how to be more compassionate. In 1970, he switched careers and began working as a financial analyst for the Campbell-Ewald Company, an advertising agency, where he worked until 1976. While at Campbell-Ewald, McNeil built a relationship with Joseph P. Harris, the regional vice president of Allstate Insurance and the first African American officer to work for the company. McNeil began working in Allstate's finance department in 1976, where he later entered their management rotation development program. He goes on to discuss the uneasy relationship between insurance companies and urban communities. McNeil contends that Allstate was reluctant to invest in urban areas because it was a risky venture. He also talks about the networking opportunities and supportive culture that existed among Allstate’s African American employees, noting the mentoring he received from John P. Harris and Ike Harris.

Ronald McNeil discusses his career at Allstate and the personal strategies he employed to ascend within the insurance industry. In 1978, McNeil transferred to Allstate’s home office in Chicago, Illinois and then in 1979, he moved to New Jersey, where he became the assistant controller for the company’s eastern region. He returned to Chicago in 1987 and served in numerous capacities, including five directorships and two vice-president positions. By 1991, McNeil was appointed as regional vice-president of the Valley Forge, Pennsylvania region, Allstate’s largest region. While in Valley Forge, he started the Neighborhood Partnership Program, which sought to reach out to marginal and urban black markets. McNeil says, as he moved forward in his career, he continued to draw strength and guidance from his father. He also talks about his marriage to Regina McNeil, who he met in high school.
Ronald McNeil talks about his leadership positions and highest achievements at Allstate. In 1994, McNeil was promoted to senior vice-president of corporate relations and joined the senior management team, which consisted of the company’s top ten representatives. Two years later, he became the senior vice-president of personal property lines. In this position, he was able to increase Allstate’s income by billions and created a strategic risk management plan to track patterns in risk. McNeil also mentions his role as vice-president of product operations and senior vice president of distribution. He goes on to discuss his retirement from Allstate in February 2007 and his interest in mentoring other African Americans at the company. McNeil also elaborates on the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation Inc., a nonprofit he and his wife founded to provide scholarships for African American college students.

Ronald McNeil shares his vision and opinions regarding the relationship between African Americans and insurance companies. He believes that marginalized and/or black communities have been underserved by insurance companies. McNeil also argues that creating new products that cater to African Americans would be a lucrative venture for insurance companies. He goes on to discuss strategies for improving the black community and his work with the Boys & Girls Club and the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc.

Mentoring.
Non-profit organizations--United States.

Insurance companies--United States--Attitudes.
Boys & Girls Clubs of America.
African Americans--Social conditions--United States.
Non-profit organizations--United States.