

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Lewis

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Lewis, George Ralph, 1941-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | September 7, 2007   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:09:03).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Corporate executive George Lewis (1941 - ) was President and CEO of the Philip Morris Capital Company from 1997 to 2001. Lewis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 7, 2007, in Stamford, Connecticut. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_247   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pioneering corporate executive George Ralph Lewis was born on March 7, 1941, in Burgess, Virginia, a small Chesapeake Bay fishing village. His mother, Edith Toulson Lewis, was a homemaker, and his father, Spencer Lewis, was very enterprising and held several jobs to support his family, including working on the docks, cooking and later, starting his own business renovating homes. Expected by his parents and community to go to college, Lewis enrolled at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. Following his first year of college, Lewis spent the summer working for his uncle, a Philadelphia restaurant owner. Delivering food downtown, Lewis overheard businessmen talking about their deals, and he decided to pursue a career in business. Returning to school that fall, Lewis

changed his major to accounting and earned his B.S. degree in 1963. Later, in 1968, he earned his M.B.A. degree from Iona College in New Rochelle, New York.

Lewis' first major job was with General Foods Corporation as a sales analyst for the Kool-Aid division in New York. In 1966, he moved to W.R. Grace, a specialty chemical company, where he worked as a financial analyst. In 1967, Philip Morris hired Lewis as a corporate analyst, and the next year, he became a senior planning analyst. He was promoted to Manager of Industrial Relations in 1970, Manager of Financial Services in 1972 and Assistant Treasurer in 1973. In 1975, Lewis became Treasurer and Vice President of Financial & Planning for Philip Morris Industrial, a subsidiary company. In 1982, he moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he worked for a different subsidiary, the Seven-Up Company, as Vice President of Finance. After two years, Lewis returned to the parent company, Philip Morris Companies, Inc., as Vice President and Treasurer. At that time, one of the highest-ranking blacks in finance, he was in charge of Philip Morris' worldwide treasury activities. He oversaw the company's takeover of General Foods in 1985 and of Kraft in 1988. In 1997, Lewis became President and CEO of Philip Morris Capital Company, the finance and investment subsidiary of Philip Morris. He retired from this position in 2001.

Lewis has received numerous awards for his pioneering business achievements. Both Iona College and Hampton University have recognized him, and in 2000, he received a CNN Trumpet Tower of Power Award. In 2006, the Jackie Robinson Foundation honored him with a lifetime achievement award. He has served on the boards of several large corporations and organizations, including the Professional Golfers' Association of America, where he became the board's first black member in 1995.

George Lewis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 7, 2007.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with George Lewis was conducted by Adrienne Jones on September 7, 2007, in Stamford, Connecticut, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate executive George Lewis (1941 - ) was President and CEO of the Philip Morris Capital Company from 1997 to 2001.

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## **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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Lewis, George Ralph, 1941-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lewis, George Ralph, 1941---Interviews

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African American corporate executives.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Philip Morris Group of Companies

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## **Occupations:**

Corporate Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

BusinessMakers

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## **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 George Lewis, September 7, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:49 2007/09/07

George Lewis was born on March 7, 1941 in Burgess, Virginia to Edith Toulson Lewis and Spencer H. Lewis. Both of Lewis' parents were born and raised in Burgess, Virginia, located on the Chesapeake Bay near Reedville, Virginia. His paternal family descended from slaves Mary Cockrell Lewis and William Lewis. Lewis' paternal grandfather, Theodore H. Lewis, died when his father was a young boy, so his father worked from the age of seven years old to provide for the family. Lewis' father began his career in the fishing industry as a child, and became a cook on a commercial fishing boat. He also bought land and real estate as investments. In addition, Lewis' father helped build Reedville's Shiloh Baptist Church, where Lewis' mother took part in many activities, including the missionary club and sewing club; and Lewis attended Sunday school and meetings of the Baptist Training Union. Lewis' mother was born to farmers Bessie Jackson Toulson and Charles T. Toulson, and became a homemaker.

African American families--Virginia--Northumberland County.

African American parents--Virginia--Northumberland County.

African American grandparents--Virginia--  
Northumberland County.

Landowners--Virginia--Northumberland County.

African Americans--Virginia--Northumberland County.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:42 2007/09/07

George Lewis was raised in segregated Burgess, Virginia, where he formed a small lawn care business in his neighborhood at thirteen years old. Lewis' father, Spencer H. Lewis, was a cook in the U.S. Army during World War II, and later became a commercial fisherman who spent long periods of time at sea. Lewis attended the Shiloh Baptist Church, where he was an officer of the Baptist Training Union, and a mentee of the minister, Henry M. Ruffin. He began his education in a four-room schoolhouse, and went on to attend Julius Rosenwald High School in Reedville, Virginia. Lewis' high school English teacher, Gloria Ruffin, encouraged him to be active in school, so he played the trumpet in the marching band, and joined the basketball team. Upon graduating in 1959, he matriculated at the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. He initially studied medicine, but soon realized he was more interested in accounting, although there were few opportunities for African Americans in Corporate America at the time.

Segregation in education--Virginia--Northumberland  
County.

Segregation in housing--Virginia--Northumberland County.

African American children--Education--Virginia--  
Northumberland County.

Hampton University (Va.).

African American churches--Virginia--Northumberland  
County.

Accounting--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:26 2007/09/07

George Lewis delivered food during the summers to firms like the Sun Oil Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was inspired to join Corporate America. Upon

graduating from the Hampton Institute, he obtained a position at the General Foods Corporation in 1963, and became the first African American in a financial role there. He began as a sales accountant in the Kool-Aid division, and was soon promoted to financial analyst, and then to product analyst. In order to achieve his goal of further promotions, Lewis began studying towards an M.B.A. degree at New York University, and then transferred Iona College in New Rochelle, New York, which was closer to his home in Westchester, New York. For four years, he worked during the day and took night classes to earn his M.B.A. degree. He was then recruited to join W.R. Grace and Company as a member of the CEO's personal staff, and went on to work for Philip Morris Inc. Lewis also recalls meeting his wife, Lillian Glenn Lewis, at the Hampton Institute.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Virginia--Northumberland County.

Hampton University (Va.)

Sun Oil Company.

General Foods Corporation.

Pepsi-Cola Company.

Philip Morris Incorporated.

African American corporate executives.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:29 2007/09/07

George Lewis joined Philip Morris Inc. as a planning analyst in 1967; and, three years later, was promoted to senior planning analyst. In this capacity, he identified companies to purchase and negotiated acquisitions. Lewis was promoted to assistant treasurer in 1972; and was later sent to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to act as the senior vice president of finance for Philip Morris Industrial, thus becoming the youngest vice president at Philip Morris, Inc. In Wisconsin, he began playing golf with Thomas B. Shropshire, an executive of the Miller Brewing Company, which was owned by Philip Morris, Inc. at the time; and eventually joined the Ville du Parc Country Club, where

he was the only African American member. Then, Lewis cofounded the MALCO, Inc. automotive manufacturing company with Wayne Embry, who was the general manager of the Milwaukee Bucks. Lewis considered leaving Philip Morris Inc. to focus on his entrepreneurial activities, until Philip Morris Inc. offered him the position of CFO at 7-Up.

African American families.

African American corporate executives.

Philip Morris Incorporated.

Seven-Up Company.

Philip Morris Companies, Inc.

Country clubs--Wisconsin--Milwaukee..

Country clubs--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:33 2007/09/07

George Lewis returned to New York City in 1984 to become Philip Morris Inc.'s first African American corporate vice president and treasurer. In this role, his duties included managing bank relations and pension funds. In 1985, Lewis was responsible for financing Philip Morris Inc.'s multi-billion dollar acquisition of the Kraft Foods Group, Inc. and the General Foods Corporation. In New York City, Lewis found that country clubs did not admit African Americans; although, through a recommendation, he was able to join the Saint Andrews Golf Club in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. He played golf with black businessmen like Earl "Butch" Graves, Jr., Roy Johnson, Darwin N. Davis, Sr. and Ronald T. Gault. Lewis went on to serve on the advisory board of the Professional Golfers' Association of America, and as chairman of the organization's investment committee. Under the leadership of Philip Morris Inc. CEO Geoffrey C. Bible, Lewis was eventually promoted to CEO and president of the Philip Morris Capital Corporation.

Philip Morris Incorporated.

African American corporate executives.

St. Andrew's Golf Club (Yonkers, N.Y.).

Professional Golfers' Association of America--Race



relations.

Woods, Tiger--Influence.

Golf courses--United States.

Discrimination in public accommodations--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:23 2007/09/07

George Lewis retired from the Philip Morris Capital Corporation at sixty years old. He remained on the boards of the Wachovia Corporation, Ceridian HCM, Inc. and the Kemper Corporation; as well as those of his alma maters, Hampton University and Iona College. In recognition of his achievements in Corporate America, Lewis received the CNN Trumpet Tower of Power Award alongside Black Enterprise founder Earl G. Graves, Sr. and former Time Warner CEO Richard Parsons. He also received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Jackie Robinson Foundation alongside Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., James Avery and Darwin N. Davis, Sr. Lewis' oldest daughter, Tonya Lewis Lee, married film director Spike Lee, with whom she had two children, Satchel Lee and Jackson Lee. His younger daughter, Tracey Lewis-Elligan, was a professor at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois; and had one son, Conner Elligan, with her husband, Don Elligan. Lewis also talks about Philip Morris Inc.'s international cigarette brands.

Philip Morris Incorporated--Trials, litigation, etc.

African American corporate executives.

Graves, Earl G., 1935-.

Parsons, Richard D., 1948-.

Lee, Spike.

Lee, Tonya Lewis.

Video Oral History Interview with George Lewis, Section  
A2007\_247\_001\_007, TRT: 0:09:41 2007/09/07

George Lewis talks about the work of American Express CEO Kenneth Chenault and Merrill Lynch and Co. CEO Stanley O'Neal, whom he considered to be role models for the next generation of African Americans in business. Lewis also reflects upon his legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.