

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marguerita Le Etta Washington

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## 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>	Washington, Marguerita LeEtta
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 5, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:27).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper publishing chief executive Marguerita Le Etta Washington (1948 - 2016) was the publisher of the Omaha Star, the only African American newspaper in Nebraska. Washington was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 5, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_280
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

*Omaha Star* publisher Marguerita Le Etta Washington was born on August 16, 1948 to Anna Le Brown and attorney Edmund Duke Washington. Washington's maternal great grandfather, the richest man in Bessemer, Alabama, left his fortune to his black daughter, her grandmother. The white relatives resolved the matter by burning down the Bessemer courthouse. Washington's aunt, Mildred Brown, founded Omaha, Nebraska's *Omaha Star* in 1938. Washington graduated from Kansas' Lincoln High School in 1964, at the age of sixteen. Afterwards, she briefly attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City. She then went on to attend the University of Nebraska at Omaha where she earned her B.A. degree in sociology and elementary education. While earning her M.A. degree in administration and special education, Washington began teaching in the Omaha public schools. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln in administration and instruction in 1985.

On November 2, 1989, Washington's aunt, Mildred Brown, was laid to rest, and Washington became the *Omaha Star's* new publisher. The *Omaha Star* has a circulation of 30,000 in Nebraska with a staff that is encouraged to be readers and critical thinkers. Regular contributions are made by Phyllis Hicks and State Representative Ernest Chambers. A community institution, the *Omaha Star's* headquarters was recognized as a historical landmark designation in 2006, and under Washington's leadership, a memorial will be created in honor of her aunt, Mildred Brown.

In 2005, the Omaha YWCA recognized Washington as one of the ten "Women of Vision." In 2007, Washington formed the "Mildred D. Brown Memorial Study Center, Inc.," in order to give young people the opportunity to study and research the history of African American journalism in Nebraska as well as getting hands on experience with a local newspaper.

Washington was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 5, 2007.

Washington passed away on February 13, 2016.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 5, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper publishing chief executive Marguerita Le Etta Washington (1948 - 2016) was the publisher of the Omaha Star, the only African American newspaper in Nebraska.

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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:

Washington, Marguerita LeEtta

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Washington, Marguerita LeEtta--Interviews

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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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### Occupations:

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Marguerita Le Etta Washington, October 5, 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 5/30/2023 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 Marguerita Le Etta Washington, Section A2007\_280\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Marguerita Le Etta Washington was born on August 16, 1948 in Kansas City, Kansas to Anna Brown Washington and Edmund Washington. Her maternal great-grandfather was a rich white man in Bessemer, Alabama. After he bequeathed his estate to his African American sons, his white relatives burned down the city courthouse, destroying the will. Washington's mother grew up in

Bessemer, and attended Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. Washington's paternal grandfather was a respected accountant and minister in Mississippi, where her father was raised. Washington's father started a family there; but, after confronting a white man who assaulted his wife, was forced to flee the state. He studied at the University of Indiana and practiced law in New York City, but fled after receiving threats from the mafia. He met Washington's mother while teaching at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes in Tallahassee. After they separated, Washington was raised by her father in Kansas City, Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington, Section A2007\_280\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Marguerita Le Etta Washington was raised by her father, Edmund Washington, in Kansas City, Missouri. They lived in an African American professional neighborhood, where there were also a few white families. As a young girl, Washington enjoyed watching 'The Untouchables' on television, and played baseball and football. She occasionally spent the summers with her mother, Anna Brown Washington; but usually travelled with her father to the western United States. In Kansas City, Washington began her education at Wendell Phillips Elementary School, where she enjoyed all her classes except home economics. Washington's parents both encouraged her education, and she aspired to attend college; but she was often disciplined for mischief at school. She went on to attend the integrated R.T. Coles Vocational and Junior High School, where she was taught by both African American and white teachers. Washington was placed in the college preparatory track upon advancing to Lincoln High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington, Section A2007\_280\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Marguerita Le Etta Washington's maternal aunt, Mildred Brown, founded the Omaha Star newspaper in 1938 in Omaha, Nebraska. Washington was expected to inherit her aunt's legacy, and studied journalism at Lincoln High School; but secretly aspired to be a teacher. Washington graduated high school in 1964, and enrolled at Lincoln University at the age of sixteen years old. She became involved in the social activities on campus; and, after her sophomore year, Washington's father transferred her to St. Teresa's College, a women's school, to focus on her studies. After one semester there, Washington eloped with her high school boyfriend, but soon regretted the marriage and obtained an annulment. Then, Washington was sent to live with her aunt in Omaha, where she earned her B.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Washington served as a teacher and administrator in the Omaha Public Schools from 1972 to 1994, and created a vocational education program for high school students.

Video Oral History Interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington, Section A2007\_280\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Marguerita Le Etta Washington became the publisher of the Omaha Star after the death of her maternal aunt, Mildred Brown, in 1989. Although she initially struggled as a manager, Washington learned to coordinate the staff, freelance and community contributors. The newspaper had been instrumental in Omaha's Civil Rights Movement, and Washington continued to use the newspaper as a platform for community issues. Under her leadership, the weekly paper covered topics like education, economic development, health and domestic abuse. Washington typically refrained from endorsing political candidates, although local politicians like State Senator Ernie Chambers sometimes wrote guest

columns. During Washington's tenure, the best-selling issues of the Omaha Star covered a U.S. President's possible black heritage, and a gang initiation ritual; and the newspaper also launched a website. Washington, who worked to publish positive news stories, reflects upon her legacy, and her hopes for Omaha's African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Marguerita Le Etta Washington, Section A2007\_280\_001\_005, TRT: 0:02:04 ?

Marguerita Le Etta Washington describes how she would like to be remembered.