

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	DeGraffenreidt, James H., 1953-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr.,
Dates:	January 31, 2008 and July 29, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	20 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:09:48).
Abstract:	Energy chief executive and administrative lawyer James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr. (1953 -) is the chairman, director and chief executive officer of the Washington Gas Light Company, which services the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. DeGraffenreidt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2008 and July 29, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_005
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of WGL Holdings, Inc. (WGL) and Washington Gas Light, James Henry DeGraffenreidt, Jr. was born on May 8, 1953 in Brooklyn, New York. As an adolescent growing up in New York City, DeGraffenreidt helped his father, an accountant, prepare federal tax returns for his clients. He attended the Brooklyn Preparatory School in Crown Heights where he played on the championship basketball team. DeGraffenreidt went on to attend Yale University where he pursued his B.A. degree in American Studies. After finishing his undergraduate education, in 1974, DeGraffenreidt attended Columbia University where he graduated with his J.D. degree and his M.B.A. in 1978.

After working as a beat reporter for the Associated Press, DeGraffenreidt practiced law at various private law firms including McKenna, Wilkinson and Kittner and Hart Carroll and Chavers. He specialized in telecommunications, public utilities and public finance. Between stints at these law firms, DeGraffenreidt served as Assistant People's Counsel representing residential and non-commercial utility consumers in Maryland in major federal and state regulatory matters. In 1986, he was hired as the senior managing attorney for the Washington Gas. Five years later, in 1991, DeGraffenreidt was elected as the Vice President of Rates and Regulatory Affairs and was responsible for handling rate cases and other regulatory matters before the commissions that control the Washington Gas' service territories. In addition, he also oversaw the company's operating divisions in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

DeGraffenreidt became the president and chief operating officer of Washington Gas in 1994 and later became the company's CEO in 1998. He has served on the boards of the Harbor Bankshares Corporation, Mass Mutual Financial Group, the American Gas Association and the Alliance to Save Energy. In 2007, DeGraffenreidt was elected to serve as chairman of the American Gas Association's board of directors. During 2005 and 2006, he served as Industry Co-Chairman of the Alliance to Save Energy.

DeGraffenreidt lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife and four children.

DeGraffenreidt was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 31, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr. was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Larry Crowe on January 31, 2008 and July 29, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 20 Betacame SP videocassettes. Energy chief executive and administrative lawyer James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr. (1953 -) is the chairman, director and chief executive officer of the Washington Gas Light Company, which services the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

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:

DeGraffenreidt, James H., 1953-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
DeGraffenreidt, James H., 1953- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington Gas Light Company

Occupations:

Energy 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 James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., January 31, 2008 and July 29, 2008. 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).

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 James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_001,
TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Tape one consists of DeGraffenreidt's family background. See above.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_002,
TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Tape begins with a discussion of DeGraffenreidt's elementary school. St. Albans was the first neighborhood in Queens to allow blacks to buy homes. DeGraffenreidt observed the transition from white to black in St. Albans (including Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans). Illinois Jacquet, Count Bassie, James Brown, Kareem Abdul J-bar lived in their neighborhood as well as many musicians. There was a class distinction between one side of the tracks in St. Albans and the other. DeGraffenreidt started playing piano when he was four. He credits this to how common it was in that neighborhood for people to know how to play music. Louis Armstrong lived near by. DeGraffenreidt was in the Boy Scouts. DeGraffenreidt tells a funny story about his den leader, who he did not know was a well established anthropologist, named Ann Southern, who later turned up as a guest lecturer in one of his classes at Yale. DeGraffenreidt tells another story of a teacher (a Dominican nun) who had trouble pronouncing his family's last name. His mother went down to the school and forced the woman to learn to pronounce the name fully and correctly. DeGraffenreidt relates another story of how he had the highest grades in his class, but his teacher would keep him ranked #2 below a white student who had a lower grade average. His father went down to the school to question the teacher and eventually the principal to correct the injustice. The one black teacher in his school was Maxine Fryer and she stood up for him and encouraged him to apply himself. DeGraffenreidt tells a story of receiving a scholarship to Brooklyn Preparatory School against the wishes of most of the nuns and faculty at St. Catherine of Sienna school. DeGraffenreidt recalls knowing Al Roker when they were kids, grew up in nearby towns and took the train together. For most of his youth, his father was a Republican and his mother was a Democrat. Parents were politically active and worked at different times for Joseph Addabbo, Floyd Flake, Nelson Rockefeller, John Lindsey, Basil Patterson. Family home was a place for people to stay on their way from New York to Washington D.C. during the March on Washington in 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_003,
TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Tape continues with discussion of his parent's political activity. He wanted to go the March on Washington but it was explained to him that they were doing it so he wouldn't have to. His job was to go to school and get good grades and succeed. DeGraffenreidt's family was Catholic and he went to Catholic schools, but a lot of New York black families sent their kids to Catholic schools because they didn't have school strikes like other schools (parents protesting busing, Ocean Hill-Brownsville controversy). DeGraffenreidt heard stories of white parents pulling black children off busses and beating them in Brooklyn during the Oceanhill-Brownsville controversy. DeGraffenreidt's parents brought food to protesters at a construction site bringing attention to discrimination in the building trades and unions. DeGraffenreidt cites this as a Black Power issue. Accompanied parents to grassroots political meetings. DeGraffenreidt remembers King's assassination. He was at Brooklyn Preparatory School. He

remembers the fear of riots and violence and how all the business had their windows broken. He tells a funny story about how after the King assassination, the white students at the school (who were the majority) wanted to walk with the black students of their school to the subway for protection. DeGraffenreidt laughs and says he was going to run if something happened, not stay around to protect the white kids. DeGraffenreidt recalls how a particular set of Jesuit priests, Father O'Connor and Jack Alexander, enacted Affirmative Action in their school. They explained to the handful of black students that they had been chosen to demonstrate to the whites that they were not only just as good as the white students but that they were better. DeGraffenreidt was on the basketball team, which was ranked in the top 10 nationally. The team was about half white and half black at a time when the student body was about 15% black.

DeGraffenreidt says the social tensions were never below the surface, but their coach, Mike Murray, (Bobby Knight's assistant at Army), was perfect to handle that. DeGraffenreidt says he had a mixed reception from white students. Some were close friends, though there were some who were clearly opposed to integration. DeGraffenreidt tells a story of white students who were jealous that he got into Yale. DeGraffenreidt graduated from high school in 1971.

DeGraffenreidt applied to University of Pennsylvania, NYU, Yale, State University of New York, and City University of New York. His father had warned him in 10th grade that if he wanted to go to a private school to start working on scholarships now. Yale recruited him. DeGraffenreidt was in the middle of the arts movement in NY, attended jazz, Broadway, and poetry performances. DeGraffenreidt also briefly discusses the origins of Hip Hop in that area in the 1970s. DeGraffenreidt discusses his first impressions of Yale. He graduated from Yale in 3 years; he was paying his own way, so finishing quickly was a way to save money he says. He met his wife, Michelle Farmer, their incoming year at Yale.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_004, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Tape begins with a discussion of Kingman Brewster, president of Yale.

DeGraffenreidt mentions a magazine on black poetry and music that DeGraffenreidt and his college friends put out. DeGraffenreidt discusses the radio program at Yale which he took part in as the music director of a black radio program. He interviewed local Black Panthers on police brutality, played excerpts from Malcolm X and Dick Gregory. Conflict erupted when the white student management tried to shut the radio program down. Kingman Brewster defended the black students and told the white students to put them back on the air. DeGraffenreidt describes Yale secret societies as "dinner clubs."

DeGraffenreidt became a member of one of the societies, described as the most integrated secret society (though he does not name it). DeGraffenreidt was a part of the Black Student Union. DeGraffenreidt's wife did studies on Maroon societies and cross cultural herbal healing. She studied the villages of the Georgia Sea Islands and Haiti. Today she is a public health physician.

DeGraffenreidt recalls the women's rights movement and gender integration at Yale in the early 1970s. Black population on Yale's campus was about 50/50 men and women. Henry Louis "Skip" Gates was at Yale at the same time. The Vietnam War is briefly covered. Graduated in 1974. DeGraffenreidt describes himself as a "solid B student." Married in 1975. Studied economics with Nobel Laureate James Tobin. DeGraffenreidt's father wanted him to be a corporate lawyer, because he felt black America had enough civil rights lawyers and needed more business oriented lawyers. His bachelor's degree was in American studies. He tells the story of how he ended up going from journalism to law

school. Ended up going to Columbia for grad school in Business and Law.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_005,
TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Tape begins with a discussion of DeGraffenreidt's schooling and experience at Columbia. Took a constitutional law course with Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Judge Jack Weinstein was his favorite teacher. Eric Holder and Ted Shaw were some of his classmates at Columbia Law School. DeGraffenreidt and his wife have 3 boys and 2 girls: Aaron, Loraine, Michelle, and Michael & Jeremy (adopted twins). DeGraffenreidt came to Washington to work for the telecommunications firm McKenna, Wilkinson, and Kitner. With this company, DeGraffenreidt did very early legal work on Hi Definition video and satellite distribution. DeGraffenreidt discusses the break up of the Bell system.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section A2008_005_002_006,
TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Tape starts off discussing DeGraffenreidt's position as "assistant people's counsel," but it's unclear what they are talking about. It seems like there was a discussion off camera that was not recorded. It sounds like this is a different job from the one discussed at the end of the last tape. He begins working on energy cases. Apparently he got the position as Maryland's assistant people's counsel. A worked successfully on a case that became known as the Columbia Fraud and Abuse case. DeGraffenreidt then went into a private black firm: Heart, Carroll, and Chambers. DeGraffenreidt cites all the men in his family who were self-employed independent black men, so he was comfortable going into an independent black firm. He also worked for Washington Gas as senior managing attorney in 1986 and discusses his movement up the hierarchy of that company. Became vice president in 1989 and senior vice president a year and a half later. DeGraffenreidt discusses how the Reagan administrations' policy attack on poor people affected their business at Washington Gas. The board elected him president and Chief Operating Officer, above other longer serving executives, in 1994. DeGraffenreidt discusses how his appointment was an intended cultural shift within the company. DeGraffenreidt discusses labor relations and technological efficiencies.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_001E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_002,
TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_002E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_003,
TRT: 0:30:52 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_003E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_004,
TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_004E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_005,

TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_005E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_006,
TRT: 0:31:31 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_006E,
TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_007,
TRT: 0:09:59 ?

Video Oral History Interview with James H. DeGraffenreidt, Jr., Section B2008_005_001_007E,
TRT: