

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack

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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>	McKissack, Cheryl Mayberry
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 17, 2008 and February 7, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:03:35).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Entrepreneur and marketing executive Cheryl Mayberry McKissack (1955 - ) founded Nia Enterprises L.L.C., a Chicago based marketing data solutions firm designed to provide companies with direct access to the consumer habits of African American families, particularly focusing on African American women. McKissack was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2008 and February 7, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_015
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Founder, CEO and president of Nia Enterprises L.L.C., Cheryl Mayberry McKissack was born on June 24, 1955, in Seattle, Washington. Born the middle child and only girl to Thelma and Donald Mayberry, McKissack attended Seattle's Dunlap Elementary School and graduated from Franklin High School. She went on to earn her B.S. degree in political science in two and a half years from Seattle University in 1976.

After graduating from Seattle University, McKissack began a career with the IBM Corporation as a sales and marketing executive. While fulfilling her duties at IBM, McKissack decided to continue her education by enrolling at the Northwestern Kellogg School of Management. After graduating with her M.B.A in 1989, McKissack became the Western Area Branch Manager for the IBM Corporation in San Francisco, California, where she served until 1992. Afterwards, McKissack became Vice President of Sales and a founding member of the Network Systems Division at 3Com. In 1997, she served as the Senior Vice President and General Manager of Worldwide Sales and Marketing for Open Port Technologies, Inc.

In 2000, McKissack founded Nia Enterprises L.L.C., a Chicago based marketing data solutions firm designed to provide companies with direct access to the consumer habits of African American families, particularly focusing on African American women. Nia Enterprises L.L.C. functions through various outlets including NiaOnline and Nia Access. McKissack has been featured in several publications and is the co-editor of a series of books including *The Nia Guide For Black Women: Balancing Work and Life* and *The Nia Guide For Black Women: Achieving Career Success On Your Terms*. McKissack has been recognized for her entrepreneurial achievements and has received many honors including the Marketing Opportunities in Business and Entertainment's (MOBE) "Influencers and Innovators of the Internet and Technology" Award and the Chicago United People of Color Leadership Award. In 2006, she was named by *The Network Journal* as one of the 25 Influential Top Women, and in 2007, McKissack was awarded the State Farm Phenomenal Woman Award-Business Entrepreneur.

McKissack and her husband, Eric, live in Chicago, Illinois.

*Photo courtesy of Victor Powell*

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Julieanna L. Richardson on December 17, 2008 and February 7, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Entrepreneur and marketing executive Cheryl Mayberry McKissack (1955 - ) founded Nia Enterprises L.L.C., a Chicago based marketing data solutions firm designed to provide companies with direct access to the consumer habits of African American families, particularly focusing on African American women.

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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:

McKissack, Cheryl Mayberry

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

(Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
McKissack, Cheryl Mayberry--Interviews

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Marketing executives--Interviews

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African American advertising agencies--Interviews

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African American businesspeople--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:**

Marketing 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 Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, December 17, 2008 and February 7, 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 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 Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2008/02/07

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack was born on June 24, 1955 in Seattle, Washington to Thelma Roberson Arnold and Donald Mayberry. Her maternal grandparents, midwife Callie Roberson and laborer Robert Roberson, raised thirteen children, including her mother, in Florence, Alabama. Mayberry McKissack's paternal grandfather, Denver Mayberry, worked as a barber and minister in Wichita, Kansas. After he divorced her paternal grandmother, Beatrice Jones Keith, she married Warren Keith, and moved to Coffeyville, Kansas, where Mayberry McKissack's father spent most of his childhood. Later, he

joined the U.S. Army and moved to Seattle, where he met Mayberry McKissack's mother at the University of Washington. They married, and had three children, of whom Mayberry McKissack was the second born. Shortly after her birth, her family moved to Kansas, where she attended her paternal grandfather's church in Wichita. During the summer, she visited her maternal family in Alabama, where she experienced southern segregation. Marketing executives--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:20 2008/02/07

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack lived in segregated Wichita, Kansas until the age of four years old. During this time, she attended her paternal grandfather's Baptist church, and often visited his barber shop, where he served a white clientele. Mayberry McKissack's family then lived briefly in Denver, Colorado, before moving to the majority-black Central Area of Seattle, Washington. There, Mayberry McKissack's mother raised her and her two brothers, while her father operated a custodial business. After he transitioned to the real estate industry, her family moved to the Rainier Beach neighborhood, where they were the second African American household. Mayberry McKissack enrolled at Dunlap Elementary School, where she excelled academically and was supported by her teachers, eventually becoming the president of the honor society. When she reached the seventh grade, a busing initiative was implemented to integrate the school district, and she began to experience discrimination from both her black and white peers.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:50 2008/02/07

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack attended the majority-white Rainier Beach Junior Senior High School in Seattle, Washington. There, she was bullied by her classmates after the implementation of busing increased the school's African American population. She was frequently attacked by her female peers, and stopped participating in extracurricular activities. During this time, Mayberry

McKissack's parents were in the process of divorce. Eventually, she obtained her mother's permission to claim residence at her maternal aunt's address in order to enroll at Seattle's Franklin High School. There, despite tensions over an African American student's recent expulsion, Mayberry McKissack was accepted by her peers. She was elected president of the junior class, joined the cheerleading squad and was active with the honor society. After graduating, Mayberry McKissack received a full scholarship to Seattle University, where she matriculated in 1973. During her studies, she lived at home with her mother, and worked part time.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/02/07

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack studied political science at Seattle University and the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington from 1973 to 1976. During this time, she witnessed political activism on both campuses. Upon earning her bachelor's degree, she used her savings to travel through Europe with a coworker; and, after running out of funds, taught English for a time in Seville, Spain. Mayberry McKissack returned home early, and then obtained an administration position at the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM). There, she applied to the sales training program; and, despite discouragement from one of her supervisors, completed the program at the top of her class. While working as an IBM sales representative in Seattle, she encountered racial discrimination from clients, but received support from her branch manager, Al Martin, who was African American. Mayberry McKissack also talks about the lack of racial and gender diversity among the executive leadership of IBM.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/02/07

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack worked for the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) in Seattle, Washington and New York City. She was then assigned to Chicago, Illinois; where, despite a supervisor's resistance, she applied to a program that funded employees' M.B.A. degrees. She continued to work full time while attending

the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois, where she enjoyed working with business case studies. After one year, Mayberry McKissack was promoted to a position in Washington, D.C., and commuted to Evanston to complete the program. She graduated in 1989, and was promoted to a branch manager position in San Francisco, California. During this time, she met her husband, Eric McKissack. In her final year at IBM, Mayberry McKissack collaborated with her colleague, Bonita Coleman Stewart, to found One Moment in Time, a rental store for women's formalwear. They opened locations in Illinois and Michigan, as well as a franchised store in San Francisco.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_006, TRT: 0:27:40 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack's father, Donald Mayberry, was raised by divorced parents. He lived with his mother and stepfather, Beatrice Jones Keith and Warren Keith, in Coffeyville, Kansas; and visited his father, Denver Mayberry, in Wichita, Kansas. Mayberry McKissack's father went on to serve the U.S. military, and then enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he met Mayberry McKissack's mother, Thelma Roberson Arnold. She was one of thirteen children raised in Alabama by her mother, a cook and midwife, and father, who worked as a custodian. Mayberry McKissack's mother attended high school in New York City, where she lived with her paternal aunt and uncle. She went on to study nursing at the University of Washington. After Mayberry McKissack was born in Seattle, her family moved to Kansas, where she was pampered by her paternal grandmother and step-grandfather. Her family eventually returned to Seattle, where she began her education at Dunlap Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_007, TRT: 0:29:50 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack moved at ten years old to Rainier Beach, a majority-white area of Seattle, Washington. There, she attended Dunlap Elementary School and Rainier Beach Junior Senior High School. During the school integration process, Mayberry

McKissack faced discrimination from the African American students who were bused from Seattle's predominantly black Central Area. She was mocked for her interest in the Russian language and her membership in the honor society; while her older brother, Dirk Mayberry, was accepted because of his athleticism. With her mother's help, she transferred to Seattle's Franklin High School, where the student body was mostly Asian. During this time, her parents divorced. After graduating from high school, Mayberry McKissack studied political science at Seattle University and the University of Washington, while also working part time. She aspired to attend law school; and, after earning a degree in less than three years, began a backpacking trip in Europe.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_008, TRT: 0:29:00 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack graduated from Seattle University in 1976, and then travelled with a coworker to Europe. They eventually separated, and Mayberry McKissack visited friends who were stationed at a U.S. military base in Germany. Upon her return to the United States, she began working at IBM, where she faced racial and gender based discrimination. After several months in an administrative role, she entered the sales training program, and then became a sales representative. In this role, she sold office supplies and typewriters. During her fourteen-year career in the IBM sales division, Mayberry McKissack earned a series of promotions, and lived in San Francisco, California; New York City; Washington, D.C.; and Chicago, Illinois. She first moved to Chicago in 1987 to become a personal computer sales manager. There, she met her husband, Eric McKissack. She also earned an M.B.A. degree in 1989 from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_009, TRT: 0:29:00 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack worked for IBM in downtown Chicago, Illinois during the late 1980s. There, she met other African American businesspeople, including investment bankers Lyle Logan and Eric McKissack, the latter of whom became her husband. Mayberry McKissack

was accepted to the executive M.B.A. programs at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and the Kellogg School of Management, and graduated from the latter in 1989. She commuted from Washington, D.C. during the final year of her degree program. Around this time, she founded a women's formalwear rental business with her coworker, Bonita Coleman Stewart. When IBM transferred Mayberry McKissack to a position in California, she decided to leave the company and focus on her entrepreneurship. She had success with the company's first location in Birmingham, Michigan, but struggled with overhead costs after opening a store in Chicago. Mayberry McKissack then joined the U.S. Robotics Corporation, a modem technology company.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_010, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack joined the U.S. Robotics Corporation in 1992, after several weeks of interviews with founder Casey Cowell and executive Jonathan Zakin. She built and led the sales team during the U.S. Robotics Corporation's growth phase, and used contacts from her career at IBM to develop its commercial clientele. During this time, Mayberry McKissack worked long hours, during which she coordinated meetings with sales representatives, customers and manufacturers; and helped plan the national expansion from the company headquarters in Skokie, Illinois. While working at the U.S. Robotics Corporation, Mayberry McKissack developed close relationships with her colleagues, and helped increase the company's worth from \$150 million to \$7 billion in 1997. At that time, founder Casey Cowell sold the business to the 3Com Corporation. Mayberry McKissack recalls her reaction at the time of the sale, and the subsequent collapse of the information technology market in the early 2000s.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_011, TRT: 0:31:05 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack directed the sales division of the U.S. Robotics Corporation, where she learned the importance of hiring staff with both entrepreneurial and corporate experience. After the U.S. Robotics Corporation's sale in 1997, Mayberry McKissack joined

Open Port Technology, Inc., a telecommunications company in Chicago, Illinois. The organization faced challenges during its growth phase, including new regulations and the consolidation of the telecommunications industry; and, after her advice to the founder was rebuffed, Mayberry McKissack decided to leave the company. During her final year, she founded Nia Enterprises, LLC, an online market research firm focused on African American consumers. After investors withdrew from Open Port Technology, Inc., Mayberry McKissack began working full time on Nia Enterprises, LLC. The company conducted research on black families' consumer habits in the healthcare market, and later launched NiaOnline, a health and wellness community for African American women.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_012, TRT: 0:29:00 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack served as a corporate board member for the first time in 2000, when she joined the board of the Deluxe Corporation. At this point in the interview, she talks about the underrepresentation of African Americans in Corporate America. Mayberry McKissack was also active on civic boards, including those of IT Resources, Inc. and the University of Chicago Medical Center. In addition to her executive work, Mayberry McKissack taught a course called Entrepreneurial Selling, Skills and Strategies at the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois, and served as a business instructor through the Chicago Urban League. She talks about the election of President Barack Obama, and the prevalence of racism in the United States. She also describes her advice for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Video Oral History Interview with Cheryl Mayberry McKissack, Section A2008\_015\_002\_013, TRT: 0:10:20 2008/12/17

Cheryl Mayberry McKissack reflects upon her legacy, as well as the legacy of her generation. She shares her hopes for young African Americans, including her nieces, nephews and godchildren. Mayberry McKissack also talks about her relationship with her husband, Eric McKissack.