

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Frank 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, Frank, 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Frank Washington,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 1, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:17:36).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast chief executive and media executive Frank Washington (1947 - ) was the deputy chief of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadcast Bureau and the legal assistant to the chairman of the FCC during the Carter Administration. He also served as Vice President of Electronic Communications for McClatchy Newspapers, now The McClatchy Company, and was the chairman and CEO of Tower of Babel LLC. Washington was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 1, 2008, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_069
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney and communications industry expert Frank Washington was born on December 27, 1947, in Washington, D.C. In 1971, Washington graduated from Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations. He then went on to enroll at Yale University Law School where he graduated in 1974.

In 1974, Washington was hired as a lawyer at the firm of Arnold and Porter in Washington, D.C. Preferring a more administrative role, he pursued a governmental position. In 1976, Washington joined the Carter White House where he worked on communications policy for the Domestic Policy Council, helping to develop and implement programs to foster wider minority ownership in communications companies. He oversaw cable and broadcast as the Deputy Chief of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadcast Bureau, and was also the legal assistant to the chairman of the FCC. Then, in 1981, Washington became the vice president of Time Mirror Company and was instrumental in the development of Videotex America.

During the 1980s, Washington continued working for Time Mirror in various capacities helping to develop new cable and videotext services. In 1984, he joined McClatchy Newspapers in Sacramento, California as vice president of electronic communications and used his skills to supervise the company's cable, radio, cellular radio and electronic information services. Around this time, Washington began establishing his own business partnerships. From 1989 to 1995, he served as general partner in cable television limited partnerships located throughout the United States, with a combined subscriber base of nearly one half million. In 1995, Washington attempted unsuccessfully to buy Viacom, Inc. In 1996, he became CEO and president of the Sacramento-based computer technology solutions provider, System Integrators, Inc. In addition, Washington was a founder, investor and principal in Aurora Communications, a broadcast radio company.

Washington was the chairman and CEO of Tower of Babel LLC from 2004 to 2008, and has controlling interests in two other broadcast television operations. He serves on the boards of numerous companies including: World Television of Washington LLC, Spartan LLC, and Quantum Communications LLC. Washington also serves as the director of several non-profit organizations including: the Board of Visitors of UC Davis School of Medicine; UC Davis Medical School's Center for Health and Technology; and the California Chamber of Commerce board.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Frank Washington was conducted by Jacques Lesure on April 1, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast chief executive and media executive Frank Washington (1947 - ) was the deputy chief of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadcast Bureau and the legal assistant to the chairman of

the FCC during the Carter Administration. He also served as Vice President of Electronic Communications for McClatchy Newspapers, now The McClatchy Company, and was the chairman and CEO of Tower of Babel LLC.

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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, Frank, 1947-

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Washington, Frank, 1947---Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Interviews

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African American executives--Interviews

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United States. Federal Communications Commission--Officials and employees--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:**

Broadcast Chief Executive

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Media 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 Frank Washington, April 1, 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 Frank Washington, Section  
A2008\_069\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:14 2008/04/01

Frank Washington was born on December 27, 1947 in Washington, D.C. His mother, Ida Mayo Washington, was born in 1927 in Rockland County, New York. She attended Nyack High School in Nyack, New York. Her father worked as a chauffeur for the American yogi Pierre Arnold Bernard during the Depression. Washington's father, Frank Washington, Sr., was born October 31, 1917 in Washington D.C. He grew up poor and struggled with alcoholism as an adult. He graduated from Samuel

Chapman Armstrong Technical High School in Washington D.C. Washington's parents settled at a former U.S. Army embarkation camp called Camp Shanks in Rockland County, New York. Washington remembers Camp Shanks as an integrated community surrounded by farmland and fruit trees. Washington attended Orangeburg Elementary School and Clarkstown High School in Clarkstown, New York, and graduated in 1966. He talks about being accepted into the veterinary school at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

United States. Federal Communications Commission--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Washington, Section A2008\_069\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:17 2008/04/01

Frank Washington attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York from 1966 to 1971. Washington was admitted into the veterinary school but struggled during his first year. He applied to the School of Industrial Labor Relations and was accepted under the condition that he pass the school's labor law course. By this time, Washington had also received a draft notice to serve in the Vietnam War, but was able to obtain an F-4 designation excusing him from service because of his asthma. He describes the climate of Cornell University during the 1960s, and the events leading up to the 1969 campus takeover by the Afro-American student society.

Washington describes his unusual experiences working at a paper factory in the summers in Rockland County, New York and developing an interest in law. Washington decided to apply to law school and describes the application process. He graduated from Cornell in 1971, and talks about attending Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut and some of his notable classmates.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Washington, Section A2008\_069\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:07 2008/04/01

Frank Washington explains his move from law to communications and then to entrepreneurship. Washington enrolled at Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut

in 1971. He talks about his experience being one of ten black students in his graduating class. Washington developed a relationship with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and describes Thomas' character and the nature of their friendship. He talks about the academic challenges he experienced at Yale, as well as his experience writing a note for the Yale Law Journal. Washington received his J.D. degree in 1974 and was hired as a lawyer at the law firm of Arnold and Porter. Washington talks about what he learned there, and why he left the firm when he realized he would not make partner. In 1976, Washington was asked to work at the Office of Telecommunications Policy in the White House under the Carter Administration, where he encouraged minority ownership in broadcast radio and cable.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Washington, Section A2008\_069\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:12 2008/04/01

Frank Washington was hired under the President Jimmy Carter administration in 1976 to facilitate minority ownership in radio and cable in the Office of Telecommunications Policy. Washington wrote a policy that designated tax breaks to individual owners for selling to minorities. As a result, the number of properties owned by minorities tripled. Washington talks about being hired as a legal assistant to the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission in 1977 and his promotion to deputy chief of the Broadcast Bureau. In 1981, Washington was hired as Vice President of the Times Mirror Company. He describes cable service experiments in the early 1980s. In 1984, he joined McClatchy Newspapers in Sacramento, California, and began establishing his own investments after the company was sold in 1987. He talks about his plans for buying Viacom in 1995 for \$2.3 billion until Congress interfered.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Washington, Section A2008\_069\_001\_005, TRT: 0:14:46 2008/04/01

Frank Washington talks about becoming an independent investor and entrepreneur. He describes being forced out of the cable industry in 1996 when Congress repealed the section of the tax code that enabled the policy Washington had written. He considers how feelings of vengeance had

negatively affected his father, and talks about deciding to make peace with the government's repeal. As a result, Washington liquidated all of his cable assets and entered the newspaper industry. He was able to establish many more successful partnerships of his own afterwards. Washington talks about the possibilities for minorities in broadcasting, the importance of resilience, and having to stay ahead of the game as a person of color. He describes how he would like to be remembered and provides advice to young black entrepreneurs.