

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jeannette Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Jeannette E. (Jeannette Elizabeth), 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown,
Dates:	January 16, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:18:04).
Abstract:	Organic chemist Jeannette Brown (1934 -) is the first African American woman to earn an M.S. degree from the University of Minnesota's chemistry department and is the author of, 'African American Women Chemists'. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 16, 2012, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Organic chemist and historian, Jeannette E. Brown was born in Bronx, New York on May 13, 1934 to Freddie Brown, a building superintendant and Ada Brown. At age six, Brown was inspired by her family doctor, Arthur C. Logan, to pursue a career in science. Brown graduated from New Dorp High School on Staten Island in 1952 and in 1956, she received her B.S. degree in chemistry from Hunter College as one of two African Americans in the first class of Hunter College's new chemistry program. Brown then earned her M.S. degree in organic chemistry in 1958 from the University of Minnesota and was the first African American female to do so. Her thesis was entitled, "Study of Dye and Ylide Formation in Salts of 9-(P-dimethylaminophenyl) Flourene."

After earning her M.S. degree, Brown joined CIBA Pharmaceutical Company as a research chemist, where she developed drugs for diseases such as tuberculosis and coccidiosis, which afflicts chickens. In 1969, Brown was hired by Merck & Co. Research Laboratories where she continued synthesizing compounds for testing as potential new drugs. In 1986, she was appointed chairperson of the Project SEED Committee for the American Chemical Society. She served on the faculty at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) from 1993 to 2002 as a visiting professor of chemistry and faculty associate. Beginning in 1998, Brown also served as the regional director of the New Jersey Statewide System Initiative, improving science education in Essex and Hudson counties. In 2008, Brown contributed seven biographies of African American chemists for the African American National Biography, including those of Dr. Marie Daly and Dr. Jennie Patrick, the first African American women to receive their Ph.D. degrees in chemistry and chemical engineering, respectively. She went on to publish her own book in 2011 entitled, *African American Women Chemists* .

Brown has received recognition including outstanding alumni awards from both Hunter College and the University of Minnesota. Throughout her career, she has been involved in countless professional societies including the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCCHE) and the American Chemical Society (ACS). In 2007, Brown was an Association of Women in Science (AWIS)

fellow. She also earned recognition as an American Chemical Society fellow and a Chemical Heritage Foundation Ulyott Scholar.

Jeannette Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 16, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jeannette Brown was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 16, 2012, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Organic chemist Jeannette Brown (1934 -) is the first African American woman to earn an M.S. degree from the University of Minnesota's chemistry department and is the author of, 'African American Women Chemists'.

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:

Brown, Jeannette E. (Jeannette Elizabeth), 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Jeannette E. (Jeannette Elizabeth), 1934- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Organic Chemist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Jeannette Brown, January 16, 2012. 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 Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_001, TRT: 1:28:45 ?
Jeannette Brown describes her family history. Brown also talks about her mother's upbringing in New England and her father's upbringing in North

Carolina. Though her father was only educated through third grade, Brown's father demonstrated a curiosity that impacted her life. While discussing her father's life, Brown talks about the Wilmington Massacre of 1898 and the racial climate of North Carolina. Brown then tells the story of how her parents met. Brown describes the close relationship she had with her parents while growing up. She fondly remembers helping her father shovel coal and writing letters to her mother when she was in school or away at camp.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

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Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_002, TRT: 2:30:21 ?

Jeannette Brown shares details about her close relationship with her father and also discusses her growing up in the 1930s and 1940s and what her life was like. Brown talks about how she developed an interest in science as a result of her interactions with her neighbor, who was a doctor. Brown also recounts early memories of learning about science in school and her frequent trips to the library. Brown goes on to tell about her experiences growing up in predominately Jewish Flatbush, her life in Harlem, Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island. Finally, Jeannette Brown reminisces about her high school days Prospect Heights High School and New Dorp High School.

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Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_003, TRT: 3:29:37 ?

Jeannette Brown gives details about her interest in chemistry. Brown also talks about her high school chemistry class and her teacher. Brown recalls that she enjoyed chemistry and took her high school studies very seriously. After graduating from New Dorp High School, Brown attended Hunter College in New York, and she recounts talks about her friendship with Dr. Carol Burnette and the influence of Dr. Sweeney. From Hunter College, Brown went on to graduate school at the University of Minnesota. Brown explains her decision to pursue a Master's degree at University of Minnesota instead of pursuing a medical degree. Brown then discusses the research she performed there. Finally, Brown describes her ground-breaking discovery of liquid crystals, which were white at room temperature but turned pink when heated.

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Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_004, TRT: 4:29:07 ?

Jeannette Brown talks about graduating from the University of Minnesota and describes the racism that her family experienced when attending her graduation. Brown goes on to discuss racism in other parts of Minnesota. While Brown's experiences at the University of Minnesota were mostly positive, she shares

details about her experience as an African American and as a woman at the University of Minnesota. Upon graduation, Brown went to work at Ciba Pharmaceutical as a chemist. At Ciba, Brown worked primarily on drugs to treat Tuberculosis and Coccidiosis. Brown also discusses the development of the chemical industry in the United States. Finally, Brown tells about her experience working at Merck.

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Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_005, TRT: 5:30:09 ?

Jeannette Brown talks about her work at Merck Pharmaceuticals to develop the drug Praximin, a powerful antibiotic. During her time at Merck, Brown was exposed to chemicals and was later diagnosed with Reactive Airways Disease. Brown also tells about her experiences with the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCCHE). Brown also talks about meeting Dr. Marie Daley, the first African American woman to get a Ph.D. in Chemistry. In addition to her work in the laboratory, Brown worked on Merck Pharmaceuticals' Black University Liaison Committee to encourage more African Americans to enter the field of chemistry.

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Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_006, TRT: 6:29:45 ?

As a chemist, Jeannette Brown worked to create opportunities for others. While working at Merck Pharmaceuticals, Brown traveled to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Grambling State University, to encourage students to work in the chemical industry. Brown describes her work with the American Chemical Society to increase the number of minorities in chemistry. Brown also worked with the National Science Foundation to create more opportunities for minorities and women. For her work in chemistry, Brown was named a lifetime member of the Iota Sigma Pi, a chemistry sorority. Brown also talks about some of the female African American chemists featured in her book, including Dr. Linda Jordan, Eslanda Roberson, Josephine Silone Yates, Betty Harris, and Alice Ball.

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Video Oral History Interview with Jeannette Brown, Section A2012_010_001_007, TRT: 7:20:20 ?

Jeannette Brown speaks openly about her desire to see young African Americans pursue the sciences. Brown highlights the importance of good teachers and a strong educational foundation in the sciences. Brown also discusses the importance of programs that strengthen math and science for African American students. Though she never married, Brown has adopted a family that lives

nearby and spends her leisure time knitting, taking voice lessons, and spending time with her dog, Niecey. In spite of her great accomplishments, Brown does wish that she had pursued a PhD. Brown wants to be remembered as someone that really cared about science and about kids.

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