

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth C. Frazier

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Frazier, Kenneth C., 1954- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth C. Frazier, |
| Dates: | August 2, 2012 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2012 |
| Physical Description: | 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:22:23). |
| Abstract: | Pharmaceutical executive, lawyer, and corporate general counsel Kenneth C. Frazier (1954 -) was the first African American to serve as CEO of a major pharmaceutical company and was known for his success in corporate law. Frazier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 2, 2012, in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2012_124 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pharmaceutical executive, lawyer, and corporate general counsel Kenneth C. Frazier was born on December 17, 1954 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to janitor and former sharecropper Otis Tindley Frazier and homemaker Clara Elizabeth Frazier. The second of three children, Frazier grew up in the deeply impoverished neighborhood of North Philadelphia. Frazier's parents strongly encouraged education and hard work, ensuring that each of their children knew what it took to succeed. In 1966, when Frazier was twelve, his mother passed away, leaving Otis Frazier to raise three children alone. Frazier graduated from Northeast High

School in Philadelphia before attending Pennsylvania State University. Upon completing his B.A. degree in 1975 with highest honors, Frazier enrolled at Harvard Law School, receiving his J.D. degree in 1978.

For the next fourteen years, Frazier worked as a lawyer and, eventually, partner at the Philadelphia law firm of Drinker, Biddle, & Reath. There he represented many corporate clients, including AlliedSignal and Merck & Co., Inc. However, the case which brought Frazier the most praise during this time was the pro bono work he contributed to freeing the innocent Willie “Bo” Cochran after twenty-one years on death row. Frazier accepted a position at Merck & Co., Inc in 1992. Frazier has served in various capacities at Merck, including general counsel, secretary, and vice president. During his tenure as general counsel, Frazier achieved great success in leading the company through more than 5,000 lawsuits regarding the alleged harmful effects of Vioxx.

In 2007, Frazier accepted the role of president of Merck & Co., Inc, and was given the additional roles of CEO and chairman in 2011, making him the first African American to serve as CEO of a major pharmaceutical company. Frazier has served on the boards of several organizations, such as Exxon Mobil, Penn State University, and Cornerstone Christian Academy, a private charter school serving at-risk youth in Philadelphia, which he also co-founded. Due to his professional success and his position on the board of trustees, Frazier was selected to lead the investigation of the allegations against former Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky and university officials. Frazier has received numerous awards, including the 2001 Penn State Alumni Fellow Award, the Association of Corporate Counsel’s 2004 Excellence in Corporate Practice Award, and the Equal Justice Initiative’s 2009 Equal Justice Champion award.

Frazier lives in Pennsylvania with his wife, Andréa, and their son, James. Their daughter, Lauren, is an engineer.

Frazier was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 2, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth C. Frazier was conducted by Deborah Lathen on August 2, 2012, in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Pharmaceutical executive, lawyer, and corporate general counsel Kenneth C. Frazier (1954 -) was the first African American to serve as CEO of a major pharmaceutical company and was known for his success in corporate law.

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:

Frazier, Kenneth C., 1954-

Lathen, Deborah (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Frazier, Kenneth C., 1954---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Lawyer

Corporate General Counsel

Pharmaceutical Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 Kenneth C. Frazier, August 2, 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 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).

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 Kenneth C. Frazier, Section A2012_124_001_001, TRT: 1:30:04 2012/08/02

Kenneth C. Frazier was born on December 17, 1954 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Clara Frazier and Otis Frazier. His maternal family migrated from Harrisonburg, Virginia in the early 20th century, and settled in Philadelphia, where Frazier's mother was born in 1925. Frazier's paternal grandfather, former slave Richard Frazier, worked as a sharecropper in Greenwood, South Carolina, where Frazier's father was born in 1900. He was sent north to Philadelphia at fifteen years old. There, he met and married Frazier's mother, and they settled in a black neighborhood in North Central Philadelphia, where Frazier grew up. Frazier began his education at Morton Hall Stanton Elementary School; and, because of his high grades and strong reading skills, was selected to attend the Julia R. Masterman Laboratory and Demonstration School from the fourth grade. In 1966, Frazier's mother passed away. From that time, he was raised by his father with help from his maternal aunts, Margaret Frazier and Lovely Frazier.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth C. Frazier, Section
A2012_124_001_002, TRT: 2:29:06 2012/08/02

Kenneth C. Frazier attended North East High School, which was a magnet school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, he received a failing grade in geometry, and was forced to repeat the course in summer school. From that time, he took his academic career more seriously, and went on to skip two grade levels. In 1971, Frazier graduated from high school at fifteen years old. He planned to enroll at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, but was deferred because of his age. Instead, he matriculated at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania, where he majored in political science and history. The campus was majority-white, and he and his black peers frequently experienced discrimination. Even so, Frazier embraced the opportunity to experience life outside of North Philadelphia. He graduated in 1975, and enrolled at the Harvard Law School, where he excelled in his courses and co-founded a club football team called the Black Plague.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth C. Frazier, Section
A2012_124_001_003, TRT: 3:29:13 2012/08/02

Kenneth C. Frazier attended the Harvard Law School, where he joined the Black Law Students Association. He was mentored by Professor John Payton, who was formerly an attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. In 1978, Frazier completed his J.D. degree and secured an associate position at the law firm of Drinker Biddle and Reath LLP in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1985, Frazier became the second African American partner at the firm. He left the law firm in 1992, and became general counsel to a joint venture between the Astra AB and Merck and Co., Inc. pharmaceutical companies. He later became the vice president of public affairs at Merck and Co., Inc. In 1995, Frazier successfully argued the appellate case of Cochran v. Herring, which overturned the death sentence of James “Bo” Cochran. For this achievement, he was later awarded the American Bar Association Pro Bono Publico Award.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth C. Frazier, Section
A2012_124_001_004, TRT: 4:29:19 2012/08/02

Kenneth C. Frazier was promoted to general counsel at Merck and Co., Inc. in 2000, and maintained his responsibilities in the public affairs division. In 2004, Frazier led the pharmaceutical company's legal defense following the recall of Vioxx, a pain medication that increased the risk of heart attack and stroke. Because Merck and Co., Inc. withheld information about the drug's side effects for five years, the company faced thousands of wrongful death cases and class actions. Frazier tried twenty cases, and developed a successful legal strategy. He also served as the company's spokesperson during this time, and appeared on numerous news outlets. In 2008, the plaintiffs agreed to a mass tort settlement, and Frazier was named CEO of Merck and Co., Inc. When the company's stock prices dropped after a \$5 billion investment failed to produce a marketable drug, Frazier increased the research and development budget; and, under his leadership, the company's stock prices rose by half from 2010 to 2012.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth C. Frazier, Section
A2012_124_001_005, TRT: 5:24:41 2012/08/02

Kenneth C. Frazier served as the CEO of Merck and Co., Inc., which was one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies. He was also a member of the board of trustees at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania. At this point in the interview, Frazier talks about his interests in public service and education, and reflects upon his life, family and how he would like to be remembered. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and his message to future generations. Frazier concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.