## Overview of the Collection

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository:</th>
<th>The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 <a href="mailto:info@thehistorymakers.com">info@thehistorymakers.com</a> <a href="http://www.thehistorymakers.com">www.thehistorymakers.com</a></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator:</td>
<td>Jackson, Phyllis Tucker Vinson, 1948-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates:</td>
<td>December 16, 2013 and November 17, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulk Dates:</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Description:</td>
<td>12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:30:29).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract:</td>
<td>Broadcast executive Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson (1948- ) was the first African American woman to reach the level of vice president in programming when she was hired as the vice president of children’s and family programs at NBC in 1982. Jackson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 16, 2013 and November 17, 2013, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.</td>
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<td>Identification:</td>
<td>A2013_296</td>
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<td>Language:</td>
<td>The interview and records are in English.</td>
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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson was born in 1948 in Los Angeles, California. Jackson graduated from George Washington High School in 1966. She went on to receive her B.A. degree in child development from California State University in Los Angeles in 1972.

Upon graduation, Jackson was hired as a secretary in the network research department of NBC-TV. She was promoted to a manager 1976, and soon became a
program executive and supervisor for many shows, including *The Richard Pryor Show*, *Chico & the Man*, *Little House on the Prairie*, and *ChiPs*. In 1982, Jackson was promoted to vice president of children’s and family programs at NBC, becoming the first African American woman to reach the level of vice president in programming. While serving as vice president, she implemented, directed and supervised a number of children’s television programs, including the *Smurfs*, *Alvin & the Chipmunks*, *Mr. T*, *Punky Brewster*, Jim Henson’s *StoryTeller*, *Big Bird Goes to China*, and *Saved by the Bell*. Jackson was instrumental in making NBC Saturday morning the number-one rated kids network for seven years, and she increased advertising sales from $2 million to $35 million.

In 1991, Jackson joined the World African Network, where she served as executive vice president until 1997. After raising her family in South Africa for thirteen years, Jackson returned to the United States when she was hired as the special projects consultant for the launch of The Hub cable network. Jackson was promoted to network story editor of The Hub in 2012. Then, in that same year, she was hired as the vice president of broadcast standards and practices at Saban Brands, where she became responsible for the review of all Saban Brands programming content for the CW Saturday morning block. Jackson has received many honors and awards, including being named to *Dollars and Sense Magazine*’s America’s Top 100 Black Business and Professional Women. She was also appointed to the board of trustees of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts by President Bill Clinton.

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 17, 2013.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 16, 2013 and November 17, 2013, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast executive Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson (1948- ) was the first African American woman to reach the level of vice president in programming when she was hired as the vice president of children’s and family programs at NBC in 1982.

**Restrictions**

**Restrictions on Access**
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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.

**Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Persons:**

Jackson, Phyllis Tucker Vinson, 1948-
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews
Jackson, Phyllis Tucker Vinson, 1948---Interviews

**Organizations:**
Occupations:

Broadcast Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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


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 Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_001_001, TRT: 1:28:23 2013/11/17

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson was born on July 2, 1948 in Los Angeles, California. Her mother, Vivian Scott Middleton, was born in 1920 on a farm in Neeses, South Carolina. Middleton and her sisters were first-generation graduates of Claflin College, in Orangeburg, South Carolina. She taught at Deuel Vocational Institution, San Joaquin County, California and later in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Jackson’s father, Philip Govan Middleton was born in 1916 and raised in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Jackson’s paternal family are descendants of the Middleton Place Plantation in South Carolina. Jackson’s paternal grandfather, Samuel Middleton, taught at Claflin College, where her parents met as undergraduate students. They settled in Lancaster, California and relocated to a middle-class African American community in South Los Angeles. Jackson lists her siblings, describes her parents’ personalities and remembers her first day in the fifth grade at 116th Street Elementary School in Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_001_002, TRT: 2:29:08 2013/11/17

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson graduated from George Washington Preparatory High School in Los Angeles, California in 1966. In high school, Jackson was very involved in Jack and Jill of America, Inc. Her high school counselor discouraged her from applying to college, however, she applied to and was accepted into Los Angeles Harbor Community College. Jackson had her first
son and married in 1968 at age nineteen. The marriage ended in 1971 and Jackson began working as a typist at the Los Angeles Police Department. Jackson talks about television shows she watched as a child and going on a local dance show, the Lloyd Thaxton Show, as a teenager. Jackson remembers the news of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 and the riots in Watts, California in 1965. Jackson talks about her family’s values, her role models and the similarities between American schools in the 1950s and South African schools her children attended in the 1990s.


Phyllis Jackson earned her B.A. degree in child development from California State University, Los Angeles in Los Angeles, California in 1972 where she held a variety of jobs to support herself and her son. While applying for a position at the police academy in 1969, Jackson aspired to be a preschool teacher while working in a mobile pre-school program. After graduation, unable to find a job teaching, Jackson was hired by NBC in 1971 as a secretary for the head of NBC’s research department. In 1977, she was promoted to manager of variety programing. Jackson shares her thoughts on the men behind ‘The Richard Pryor Show’: Richard Pryor, director Rocco Urbisci, and writer and comedian Paul Mooney while recalling the time during the live taping of the show’s first episode when Pryor refused to leave his dressing room. Jackson talks about the television show ‘Julia,’ starring HistoryMaker Diahann Carroll, and the TV shows that aired on NBC when she first started working there.


Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson initially worked at NBC as a program executive in variety programming, but moved to dramatic programing which she preferred. Here she worked on the popular scripted series ‘Little House on the Prairie’ and ‘CHiPs’ as well as ‘The Wonderful World of Disney.’ At the same time, Jackson took courses towards a master’s degree at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena,
California, but ultimately did not finish her degree. In 1979, Jackson was promoted to her dream job as the director of children’s programming at NBC where she was tasked with improving the network’s Saturday morning line-up. Jackson focused on developing shows with strong characters and moral lessons. During her time there, ‘Smurfs’ TV show aired in 1981, and ‘Alvin and the Chipmunks’ TV show, aired in 1983. Jackson talks about the production process in children’s programming, the role of toy manufacturers in children’s television, and the reasons ‘The Richard Pryor Show’ was unsuccessful.

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_001_005, TRT: 5:28:24 2013/11/17

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson developed the popular TV series ‘Saved By the Bell’ for NBC. Disney originally owned the rights, to the series but abandoned it after thirteen episodes. It was important to Jackson that each episode have a lesson in morality, and she brought in HistoryMaker Karen Hill-Scott as a consultant on the show. Jackson was pleased to see the positive impact the show had on teenagers worldwide. While at NBC, Jackson hired a number of African Americans, such as HistoryMakers Winifred Scott and Hamilton Cloud II. In 1987, her husband, Eugene Jackson, founded the World African Network; and, in 1991, Jackson left NBC. Jackson talks about the importance of diversity and representation of people of color on television and the role that she played a role in the early 1980s. Jackson also describes her work with Bill Cosby briefly on a TV show, naming characters after her children, and NBC’s deciding not invest in Cabbage Patch Dolls, something that could have been incredibly lucrative.


Phyllis Jackson left her position at NBC as Vice President of Children’s Family Programs in 1991. She worked briefly at NBC Productions, where she felt limited and her shows under development were “too black.” Jackson then became Executive Vice President of her husband, Eugene Jackson’s company, the World African Network. They developed content such as, ‘Miss Collegiate African
developed content such as, ‘Miss Collegiate African American Pageant’ and ‘Stomp,’ and launched the World African Network Online. In 1992, they were approached to bid on a license for a television network in South Africa, which prompted the couple to consider moving to and helping to build post-apartheid South Africa. During the 1990s, Jackson and her family made the transition to living in South Africa and eventually bought a farm outside of Pretoria, South Africa. Jackson talks about her sister, meeting HistoryMakers Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Ronald T. Gault, and her observations of fashion trends in South Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_002_007, TRT: 7:29:27 2013/12/16

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson was Vice President of Children’s Family programs at NBC from 1982 through 1991. During that time, she convened a conference to educate the television industry about the need for diversity in television. Jackson believes that this conference influenced NBC executive Brandon Tartikoff’s casting of Philip Michael Thomas on ‘Miami Vice’ and the release of ‘The Cosby Show,’ both of which aired in 1984. Jackson worked on Project Peacock at NBC which aired family specials, such as ‘Big Bird Goes to China’ in 1983, and ‘The Storytellers’ in 1988. Jackson also worked on the ‘Gummi Bears,’ which aired in 1985. One of the most successful shows of Jackson’s was ‘Saved by the Bell,’ which aired in 1989, and became a model for creating teen shows with diverse casts. Jackson talks about the book, ‘The Black Snowman’ by Phil Mendez, the Cabbage Patch Kids, the production schedule of children’s programming, and the success of Nickelodeon.

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_002_008, TRT: 8:28:36 2013/12/16

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson left NBC Productions in 1991 to serve as Executive Vice President of World African Network, a TV network founded by her husband, Eugene Jackson, HistoryMaker Clarence Avant, Sidney Small and Percy Sutton with a focus on family programming, documentaries, and news from across the African diaspora. Never able to convince the cable industry of the need for two black networks, World
African Network folded in 1996 having produced some programming, such as ‘Stomp’ a step-show competition, which was a part of the popularization of the Historically Black College and University experience in the 1990s. In retrospect, Jackson believes that the network should have developed a four hour block of programming, instead of a full slate of shows. In 1994, Jackson and her family moved to Atlanta, Georgia, while planning their move to South Africa. Jackson talks about the type of programming she would have liked to air on NBC and how network television has changed since the 1980s and 1990s.

Phyllis Jackson visited South Africa in October of 1992, to consult with South African media personality Dali Tambo and a team trying to start a television network. She and her husband, Eugene Jackson, brought their family to visit South Africa in December of that year, and had the opportunity to visit Nelson Mandela at his house on Christmas Eve. They also attended Mandela’s inauguration as president in 1994. The group Jackson was working with did not win the bid for the television network, but in 1996 her husband started a cell phone business in South Africa, Afrotel. The family moved to South Africa in 1998 and her children were sent to South African schools. During the 1990s many African Americans moved to South Africa, including HistoryMakers Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Ronald T. Gault. Jackson talks about the culture of post-apartheid South Africa and the cultural differences in South African business. Jackson also talks about the type of programming she had hoped to produce on the World African Network.

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson lived in South Africa with her family until 2010 where she connected with high-ranking government officials, did event planning, including a World AIDS Day event and produced the show, ‘Scout’s Safari,’ from 2003 to 2004. Jackson learned

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_002_011, TRT: 11:33:17 2013/12/16

Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson describes her feeling of nostalgia being at Saban Brands; many of her coworkers grew up watching the shows she produced at NBC. Plus, the first African American Power Ranger was named after her daughter, Aisha Jackson. Jackson dreamed of creating a television show that told children’s stories from the African diaspora. She also describes the film industry in Africa and the role of Nigeria. She talks about her divorce from Eugene Jackson and the focus on her children. She ends the interview by describing what she would want her legacy to be, what in her life should would do differently, her hopes for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes her interview by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, Section A2013_296_002_012, TRT: 12:10:18 2013/12/16

Phyllis Jackson narrates her photographs.