

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Pierre Sutton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sutton, Pierre M., 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton,
Dates:	December 10, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:31:54).
Abstract:	Broadcast executive Pierre Sutton (1947 -) was the cofounder of The New York Courier and president of the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation. He also served as the inaugural vice president of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB). Sutton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 10, 2013, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_314
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcasting executive Pierre M. Sutton was born on February 1, 1947 in Brooklyn, New York, to parents Percy E. Sutton and Leatrice Sutton. He attended the University of Toledo in Ohio and received his B.A. degree in 1968. Sutton then pursued graduate studies at the University of Kentucky and New York University, and later completed the Owner/President Management Program at Harvard Business School.

In 1971, Sutton, along with his father, co-founded the *The New York Courier*, a weekly newspaper, where he served as the executive editor until 1972. During that time, he also fulfilled duties as the vice president of Inner City Research & Analysis Corporation in New York City. Also in 1971, Sutton's father co-founded Inner City Broadcasting Corporation (ICBC), one of the first African American-owned broadcasting companies in the United States. When ICBC acquired WLIB Radio in New York City in 1972, Sutton was brought on as the public affairs director. He then served as the vice president of ICBC from 1975 until 1977. Then, in 1977, Sutton became the president of ICBC and assumed responsibilities of the company's radio stations in New York and California.

Sutton has held leadership positions in numerous professional, business and non-profit organizations. He served as a member of the board of directors for the Better Business Bureau of Harlem from 1972 to 1977; then Sutton was named as the inaugural vice president of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB). He also became a member of the board of directors for the Minority Investment Fund. Sutton's community involvement includes serving as the chairman of the board of directors for the Harlem Chapter of the Boy Scouts of America. He was selected to sit on the board of directors for the New York City Marathon in 1979, and was appointed as its executive commissioner. He also served as a member of the board of directors for the Hayden Planetarium, and as a member of the board of trustees for the Alvin & Ailey Dance Foundation.

Pierre M. Sutton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 10, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Pierre Sutton was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 10, 2013, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast executive Pierre Sutton (1947 -) was the cofounder of *The New York Courier* and president of the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation. He also served as the inaugural vice president of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB).

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

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:

Sutton, Pierre M., 1947-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Sutton, Pierre M., 1947---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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, December 10, 2013. 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 Pierre Sutton, Section
A2013_314_001_001, TRT: 1:30:36 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton was born on February 1, 1947 in New York City to Leatrice O'Farrell Sutton and Percy Sutton. His maternal grandfather, Cecil O'Farrell, was a Bermudan immigrant of Irish and Bajan descent. He immigrated to New York City, where he was briefly a dockworker before beginning a lifelong career at Bond Bakery. At the time of his retirement, he was the bakery's vice president of sanitation. Sutton's maternal grandmother, Edna Tyrrell Stanziano, was also of Bajan descent. Both she and his maternal grandfather could pass as white. Sutton's paternal grandparents, Lillian Smith Sutton and Samuel Sutton, Sr., worked as farmers in San Antonio, Texas. Sutton's parents met in New York City while his father was serving in the U.S. military. Sutton grew up in Queens, New York, where he attended P.S. 123, J.H.S. 59 and Andrew Jackson High School. He spent the summers on his paternal family's farm in San Antonio, and lived with his maternal grandparents during his parents' separation in the early 1950s.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section
A2013_314_001_002, TRT: 2:28:55 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton's father, Percy Sutton, earned a degree from the Brooklyn Law School after serving in World War II with the U.S. Air Force. He then joined the Judge Advocate General's Corps during the Korean War. Upon his return to New York City, Sutton's father opened a private law practice with Mallalieu Woolfolk. During this time, Sutton graduated from Andrew Jackson High School, and studied for two years at the University of Toledo in Ohio. He was drafted into the U.S. Marine

Corps during the Vietnam War. He trained at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island in South Carolina, and then began a three-year term of service at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in San Diego County, California. Sutton spent thirteen months in the I Corps Tactical Zone of South Vietnam. Upon his return, he attended New York University, and began suffering from PTSD. Hoping to help him recover, Sutton's father purchased The New York Courier. Sutton ran the newspaper with his childhood friend, Charles M. Woolfolk.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section A2013_314_001_003, TRT: 3:30:15 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton's father, Percy Sutton, cofounded the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation (ICBC) in New York City in 1970. Shortly afterwards, Sutton and his father established the Inner City Research and Analysis Corporation, which focused on polling New York City's black community and selling the information to marketing consultants. Sutton served as the vice president of the research firm, while also operating The New York Courier, which featured articles on African politics and the Black Power movement. In 1972, Sutton sold the newspaper to the New York Amsterdam News, another black-owned publication. That year, Sutton was hired as the director of public affairs at WLIB Radio, which the ICBC purchased from Harry Novik. The acquisition was financed with assistance from Harlem community leaders and banks, including the Chemical Bank. In 1974, the ICBC acquired WLIB Radio's FM sister station, WBLS Radio, which became the number one radio station in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section A2013_314_001_004, TRT: 4:29:29 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton attended the National Black Political Assembly (NBPA) in Gary, Indiana in 1972. The purpose of the convention was to choose the first African American presidential candidate. Later that year, Shirley Chisholm became the first African American and first woman to run for president, against the advice of the NBPA. During this time, the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation (ICBC) focused on its flagship AM station, WLIB Radio, which featured Afrocentric talk shows and

news. After the invention of the polarized antenna, the FM frequency became a viable technology. The ICBC then purchased WLIB-FM Radio, which they renamed WBLS Radio. Initially a jazz station, WBLS Radio pioneered the urban contemporary format under deejay Frankie Crocker. David Lampel was hired as the news director for both WLIB Radio and WBLS Radio. Sutton initially served as the ICBC's public affairs director, and was soon promoted to president. He also managed his father's mayoral campaign in 1977.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section
A2013_314_001_005, TRT: 5:31:45 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton was instrumental in the expansion of the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation (ICBC) beyond New York City. To determine where to purchase radio stations, he visited cities to evaluate their culture and programming needs. He also selected veteran employees from WLIB Radio and WBLS Radio to develop the new stations. At the start of the expansion process, Sutton attempted to purchase KJLH Radio in Inglewood, California from John Lamar Hill, Jr., but was unable to negotiate a deal. The station was later acquired by Stevie Wonder. Sutton went on to purchase San Francisco's KRE Radio, which he renamed KBLX Radio. The station faced opposition from the San Francisco Bay Guardian, which claimed that Sutton was planning to change the music played by the formerly white-owned jazz station. The station was picketed by the community in response. In 1980, Percy Sutton initiated a project to revitalize the Apollo Theater under the auspices of the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section
A2013_314_001_006, TRT: 6:30:43 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton and his father, Percy Sutton, oversaw the restoration of the Apollo Theater in New York City's Harlem neighborhood. The renovations included the installation of cutting edge television production and post-production facilities. In order to finance the project, Inner City Broadcasting Corporation (ICBC) sold the WLBS Radio station in Detroit, Michigan and the KGFJ Radio and KUTE Radio stations in Los Angeles, California. The

project was intended to attract jobs and development to Harlem, but the television industry refused to work in the neighborhood. Sutton proposed broadcasting an amateur hour program called 'Showtime at the Apollo.' Hosted by Steve Harvey, the show ran for ten years under the management of Sutton's sister, Cheryl Sutton. Despite its popular success, the program failed to generate revenue. During the 1980s, WBLS Radio faced increasing competition from disco stations like WRKS Radio and WQHT Radio. In response, Sutton and his father transitioned to the emerging cable industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Pierre Sutton, Section A2013_314_001_007, TRT: 7:30:11 2013/12/10

Pierre Sutton partnered with black broadcasting executives Sydney Small and Eugene D. Jackson to found the Queens Inner Unity Cable Systems (QIUCS). The company developed the infrastructure for satellite cable in Queens, New York. Sutton was also created Urban Cable Works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1980, Sutton's father, Percy Sutton, initiated a project to remodel New York City's Apollo Theater through the Inner City Broadcasting Company (ICBC). Sutton helped fund the renovations by selling ICBC assets, but was eventually forced to separate from the Apollo Theater due to financial problems. At this point, Sutton describes his father's projects, including his plan to develop the cable infrastructure in Africa. He also talks about his father's role in the redevelopment of Harlem. Sutton concludes the interview by reflecting upon the impact of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which deregulated the broadcasting industry and removed tax incentives for minority radio station owners.