

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sidmel Estes

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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>	Estes, Sidmel, 1954-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 17, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:49:51).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Media consultant and television producer Sidmel Estes (1954 - 2015 ) was the founder and CEO of BreakThrough Inc. and the first woman president of the National Association of Black Journalists. She worked as an executive producer at WAGA-TV, where she created Good Day Atlanta. Estes-Sumpter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 17, 2014, in Fayetteville , Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_065
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Media consultant and executive television producer Sidmel Estes was born on November 27, 1954 in Marysville, California, to Emellen Estes and Sidney Estes. Estes attended elementary and high school at public schools in Atlanta. She earned her B.S.J. degree in 1976, and her M.S.J. degree in 1977, both from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1979, Estes returned to Atlanta and was hired at WAGA-TV/Fox 5, where she served as the executive producer of numerous programs. She was the co-creator and executive producer of *Good Day Atlanta*, which became the number one show in its market, and won seven Emmy Awards under her direction. In 2006 Estes left WAGA-TV in order to found and serve as CEO of BreakThrough Inc., a media consulting firm whose clients include the Frederick Douglass Family Foundation, the McCormick Tribune Fellows Foundation, the Tupac Amaru Shakur Foundation and the Atlanta Center for Creative Inquiry. She has also taught as an adjunct professor at Emory University and Clark Atlanta University.

In 1991, Estes was elected the first woman president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Under her leadership NABJ increased its membership to over 2,000 journalists and was included in *Ebony's* list of *Top 100 Black Organizations*. In 1994, she was a leader and co-creator of the first Unity Conference, an alliance of journalists of color, and was instrumental in the release of their report *Kerner Plus 25: A Call For Action*, which outlined steps the media industry should take to improve racial diversity.

During her prolific career in television and journalism, Estes has been recognized numerous times. Atlanta's Mayor Andrew Young proclaimed "Sidmel Estes-Sumpter Day" on November 18, 1988 after she was named Media Woman of the Year by the Atlanta Chapter of the National Association of Media Women. She was featured in *Ebony's* 100 Most Influential Black Americans in 1993, and in *More Magazine's* book *50 Over 50*. Estes was

honored with the Silver Circle Award from the Television Academy and has won several Emmy Awards. She received Northwestern University's Alumni Service Award after being elected as president of the Northwestern Black Alumni Association in 2004.

Estes married B. Garnett Sumpter in 1983, and they had two children, Joshua and Sidney.

Sidmel Estes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 17, 2014.

Sidmel Estes passed away on October 6, 2015.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sidmel Estes was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 17, 2014, in Fayetteville, Georgia, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Media consultant and television producer Sidmel Estes (1954 - 2015) was the founder and CEO of BreakThrough Inc. and the first woman president of the National Association of Black Journalists. She worked as an executive producer at WAGA-TV, where she created Good Day Atlanta.

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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:

Estes, Sidmel, 1954-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Estes, Sidmel, 1954---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:

Media Consultant

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Television Producer

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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 Sidmel Estes, February 17, 2014. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:27  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes was born on November 27, 1954 in Marysville, California to Emellen Mitchell Estes and Sidney Estes. Her maternal grandparents, Luella Mitchell and Edward Mitchell, lived in Birmingham, Alabama, where Estes' mother was born in 1921. Estes' maternal grandmother died in 1925, and her family then moved to Atlanta, Georgia. There, Estes' grandfather earned a Ph.D. degree in theology from Emory University, and became a dean at Morris Brown College. Estes' mother graduated from Atlanta's Booker T. Washington High School, and then attended Morris Brown College and Atlanta University. After earning a master's degree in education, she became an elementary school principal. Estes' paternal grandmother, Fannie Estes, was born in Gaffney, South Carolina. She moved to Atlanta for her husband's work as a Pullman porter, and gave birth to their only son, Estes' father, in 1932. He went on to study education, completing a master's degree at Atlanta University and a Ph.D. degree at Indiana University.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:43  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes grew up in the Collier Heights community in Atlanta, Georgia during the 1960s. She began her education at Frank L. Stanton Elementary School, and then transferred to the newly built M. Agnes Jones Elementary School, where her mother was the principal. Estes took ballet classes with Yolanda King, who was the daughter of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She became interested in journalism at an early age, after noticing the misrepresentation of civil rights activists by the white press. Upon entering the eighth grade, Estes enrolled at the formerly all-white Northside High School. She became president of the school band, served on the student government and created exhibits for Black History Week. She also joined the staff of The Northerner newspaper, where she covered the Black Panther Party's breakfast programs. After graduating in 1972, Estes enrolled at Northwestern University, where she studied under scholars like Jan Carew, Cyrus Colter and Robert A. Hill.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:33  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes enrolled in 1972 at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in Evanston, Illinois. She studied under the noted African American journalist Jay Harris, who mentored Estes and her black peers. Estes completed an internship at the Chicago Defender, where she met John H. Sengstacke, Ethel Payne and Lynn Norment. She also broke the story about Al Green being scalded with hot grits by his girlfriend, which became her first front page article. Estes interned at the Chicago Daily News in 1975, and then decided to focus on the television news industry. Upon completing a master's degree at Northwestern University in 1977, Estes was hired as a reporter at KUAM-TV in Guam, where she covered the widespread heroin use among U.S. military personnel. Facing harassment from both the military and drug cartels, she returned to Atlanta, Georgia in 1979. That year, she covered the Atlanta Missing and Murdered Children cases for WAGA-TV.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:15  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes joined WAGA-TV in Atlanta, Georgia as an assignment editor in 1979. She was responsible for researching the Atlanta Missing and Murdered Children cases, and met James Baldwin and Lee P. Harris while covering the investigation. During this time, Estes also covered the election of Mayor Andrew Young and the expansion of the William B. Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. In 1982, Estes became WAGA-TV's news producer. In 1983, she married B. Garnett Sumpter, whom she later divorced. Estes served as the chairperson of the Atlanta Association of Black Journalists from 1984 to 1986, when she was selected to join a committee of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Two years later, she was elected as a regional director of NABJ. In 1988, Mayor Andrew Young honored Estes with Sidmel Estes-Sumpter Day. That year, she covered the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, and the opening of the MARTA transit system. In 1991, Estes became the first female president of NABJ.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:46  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes used her position as president of the National Association of Black Journalists to advocate for equal hiring and better coverage of black communities. She hosted a summit to address these issues with the leaders of the four national associations of journalists of color and the CEOs of major news organizations like Knight Ridder, the Gannett Company, Inc. and The New York Times. In 1992, Estes created the morning news program 'Good Day Atlanta' for WAGA-TV in Atlanta, Georgia. The program rapidly grew in popularity to become the city's most watched morning news show. Five years later, the WAGA-TV station was acquired by FOX. Estes continued to produce 'Good Day Atlanta' until 2006, when she decided to leave WAGA-TV because of the interference of FOX executives. That year, she founded a media consulting firm called BreakThrough Inc. Estes also talks about her documentary, 'Kerner Plus 40: Change or Challenge,' and her proposal to buy Ebony and Jet.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_006, TRT: 6:12:33  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes was the president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). In 1994, she held the first UNITY: Journalists of Color convention in Atlanta, Georgia, which brought NABJ together with the national associations for Hispanic, Asian American and Native American journalists. At this point in the interview, Estes talks about changes to the organization, which was renamed UNITY: Journalists of Diversity, and shares her thoughts on the inclusion of gay and lesbian journalists. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her life and legacy. She also talks about her sons, Joshua Sumpter and Sidney Sumpter, and concludes this part of the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Sidmel Estes, Section A2014\_065\_001\_007, TRT: 7:12:34  
2014/02/17

Sidmel Estes narrates her photographs.