

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geoff Brown

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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>	Brown, Geoff, 1952-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 25, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:26:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Journalist Geoff Brown (1952 - ) was a managing editor of the Chicago Tribune, where he worked for over thirty years. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2014, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_121
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Geoffrey (Geoff) Franklin Brown was born on October 30, 1952, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to George F. and Helen V. Brown. Brown attended the Episcopal Cathedral School in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and graduated from Greensburg-Salem (Pennsylvania) High School in 1970. He went on to receive his B.A. degree in English literature from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, in 1974.

Upon graduation, Brown returned to Pennsylvania where he was hired as a general assignment reporter for the *Pittsburgh Press*. He worked at the *Pittsburgh Press* from 1974 to 1975, and again from 1977 to 1978. He also had two stints at

*Jet* magazine, from 1975 to 1977 and 1978 to 1980, where he held various positions, including entertainment writer, copy editor, co-managing editor and features editor. He was then hired by the *Chicago Tribune* in 1980 as a copy editor. Brown went on to serve as the *Tribune's* national/foreign news editor, north suburban bureau chief, and entertainment editor. In 1998, he was promoted to associate managing editor for entertainment; in 2000, he became associate managing editor for lifestyle/features. In 2009, Brown returned to duty as the *Chicago Tribune's* associate managing editor for entertainment, where he supervised the daily Arts & Entertainment, Dining, Movies and On The Town sections, plus the daily and Sunday Comics pages, and related online content. In April of 2015, Brown was named the *Tribune's* operations and development editor.

Brown received the *Chicago Tribune's* Jones-Beck Award for Outstanding Professional Performance in 1988, and was awarded a fellowship at Maynard's Institute of Journalism Education in 1989. He was also honored by Chicago's Bridge to Work program, a South Side welfare-to-work program that emphasized preparing people for getting a job as well as navigating the workplace.

Geoff Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 25, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geoff Brown was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 25, 2014, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist Geoff Brown (1952 - ) was a managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, where he worked for over thirty years.

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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

## 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:

Brown, Geoff, 1952-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Geoff, 1952---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:

## **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 Geoff Brown, April 25, 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 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).

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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.

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## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

## **Series I: Original Interview Footage**

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:30 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown was born on October 30, 1952 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Helen Young Brown and George Brown. His maternal grandparents, Willie Dobbins Young and Shelly Young, were born in the South. They later moved to Pittsburgh, where Brown's mother was born and raised. Brown's paternal grandparents, Katie Smith Brown and George Brown lived in Crittenden, Kentucky, where Brown's father was born. During his childhood, they moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Brown's father went on to join the staff of the Pittsburgh Courier, and met and married Brown's mother in Pittsburgh. After Brown was born, he and his family moved several times for his father's career as a journalist. They lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania until he was seven years old, and then moved to New York City, where his father worked for The New York Courier. Shortly afterwards, they relocated to Charlotte Amalie in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and then to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:14 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown attended the Episcopal Cathedral School in San Juan, Puerto Rico from the seventh to eleventh grades. He decided to finish high school in the United States, and was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. At Greensburg Salem High School, Brown was exposed to the racial tension in the United States for the first time since he was a small child. After graduating, he enrolled at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Inspired by his father's work, Brown decided to pursue a career in journalism, and began honing his skills as a writer and reporter. At Bowdoin College, he organized an independent study course at the Maine Times. Through the course, Brown earned class credit, and gained the experience necessary to land an internship at The Pittsburgh Press. At this point, Brown talks about the close knit community of black students at Bowdoin College. He also remembers his mentor, Larry Hall, and reflects upon the development of his writing

style.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:25 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown's classmates at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine included future American Express CEO Kenneth Chenault and education activist Geoffrey Canada. Upon graduating in 1974, Brown secured an internship at The Pittsburgh Press in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1975, Brown's father, reporter George Brown, passed away, and Brown moved to Chicago, Illinois to fill his father's position at Jet magazine. There, he was mentored by executive editor Robert E. Johnson, as well as such notable journalists as Malcolm R. West, Gregory Simms and Ronald E. Kisner. He also met the staff of the Johnson Publishing Company's Ebony magazine, including managing editors Herbert Nipson, Hans Massaquoi and Charles L. Sanders. The staff of both publications socialized in the company lunchroom, which was run by Chef Eddie Walker. Brown was promoted to the role of managing editor at Jet by 1977. That year, he resigned from Jet magazine, and returned to The Pittsburgh Press.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:42 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown was working at The Pittsburgh Press when his wife's mother fell ill in Chicago, Illinois. He decided to return to Jet magazine, where he became a features writer. In that role, he interviewed celebrities like Esther Phillips, the Jackson 5 and Gwen McCrae. Overwhelmed by the workload, Brown decided to accept a copy editor position at the Chicago Tribune. There, he worked with journalists like Monroe Anderson, Ovie Carter and Fred Mitchell. Brown was assigned to the metropolitan news desk in 1983, when Chicago elected its first black mayor, Harold Washington. On the night of the election, Brown and his African American colleagues were subjected to racist comments and widespread animosity from their white counterparts. Brown continued to write about city politics during Washington's mayoralty. He covered the council wars of 1983, when the Chicago City Council repeatedly blocked Mayor Washington's legislation and board nominations. In 1986, Brown was promoted to

associate headline editor.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:56 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown became the national and foreign news editor of the Chicago Tribune under the mentorship of Howard Tyner. He was then promoted to suburban bureau chief for Rosemont, Illinois. In this position, Brown learned to manage a staff, and continued developing as a journalist. He also met reporter Jerry Thomas. Brown later returned to the downtown bureau of the Chicago Tribune, where he became the entertainment section editor. In that capacity, he began covering events in the African American community, including the Black Creativity Gala and Black Ensemble Theater Company productions. During this period, Brown also became an associate managing editor of the comics section, where he introduced *The Boondocks*. In the early 2000s, Brown held several positions in the entertainment and lifestyle sections. Around the time of the financial crisis in 2008, the Chicago Tribune acquired over \$600 million in debt and filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, leading to multiple rounds of layoffs.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section  
A2014\_121\_001\_006, TRT: 6:32:35 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown was an associate managing editor at the Chicago Tribune in 2008, when the global financial crisis caused the company to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. He worked in the Chicago Tribune's entertainment section for over twenty years, during which he witnessed the development of the theater district and the Taste of Chicago festival, as well as the establishment of Lollapalooza and the eta Creative Arts Foundation. During the same period, many of the city's black entertainment venues shut down, and schools on the South Side lost funding for arts education. At this point, Brown talks about his role as managing editor of the Chicago Tribune's comics section. In this capacity, he was responsible for removing comics like *'The Boondocks'* and *'Doonesbury'* when they included inappropriate or libelous content. He organized a seventeen-member committee to assist with the approval decisions. Brown also talks about his plans

for retirement, and reflects upon the state of print journalism.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section A2014\_121\_001\_007, TRT: 7:15:17 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown describes his hopes for the future of print journalism. He also reflects upon his career and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoff Brown, Section A2014\_121\_001\_008, TRT: 8:06:31 2014/04/25

Geoff Brown narrates his photographs.