

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leonard Burnett, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Burnett, Leonard E., 1964-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr.,
Dates:	September 10, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:55:17).
Abstract:	Magazine publishing entrepreneur and magazine publishing chief executive Leonard Burnett, Jr. (1964 -) was the cofounder of Vanguard Media and cofounder and co-CEO of Uptown Ventures, the publisher of Uptown magazine. He was also author of Black is the New Green: Marketing to Affluent African Americans. Burnett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 10, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_148
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine publishing entrepreneur and executive Leonard Burnett was born on April 18, 1964 in Shaker Heights, Ohio. His family was involved in franchising, which sparked his interest in entrepreneurship. After attending the University of Michigan for two years, Burnett went on to Florida A&M University, where he received his B.B.A. degree in business, management and marketing in 1986.

Burnett went into business with his classmate, Keith Clinkscales, to launch his

first magazine, *Urban Profile*, in 1987, to fill a void in the media market. In 1992, Burnett and Clinkscales sold *Urban Profile* to Career Communications and got involved in the creation of *Vibe* magazine. From 1993 to 1999, Burnett served as a publisher and advertising director for the magazine. In 1999, he co-founded Vanguard Media Group with Clinkscales. Burnett served as vice president and group publisher with Vanguard and helped launch three successful urban magazines: *Savoy*, *Honey*, and *Heart & Soul*. In 2004, Burnett co-founded Uptown Media Group, or Uptown Ventures, publisher of *Uptown* magazine, where he served as the chief executive. The following year he helped *Vibe* magazine launch *Vibe: Vixen*. After *Vibe* reopened under new ownership in 2009, he served as the group publisher for the magazine until 2012.

In 2010, Burnett co-authored *Black is the New Green: Marketing to Affluent African Americans*. In 2013, he founded U Brands after re-purchasing *Uptown* magazine from InterMedia Partners and acquired Worldwide Electronic Publishing, the publisher of *Hype Hair* magazine. Burnett has successfully expanded the Uptown brand and reached underserved communities. He also has spoken at the ADCOLOR Awards and is considered an expert of African American buying power, brand-building, and marketing to both urban and affluent African American communities.

Burnett lives in New York City and has two children, Lenny Burnett III and Rani Burnett.

Leonard Burnett was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 10, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr. was conducted by Harriette Cole on September 10, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine publishing entrepreneur and magazine publishing chief executive Leonard Burnett, Jr. (1964 -) was the cofounder of Vanguard Media and cofounder and co-CEO of Uptown Ventures, the publisher of *Uptown* magazine. He was also author of *Black is the New Green: Marketing to Affluent African Americans*.

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:

Burnett, Leonard E., 1964-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Feldman, Isaac (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burnett, Leonard E., 1964---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine Publishing Entrepreneur

Magazine Publishing Chief 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 Leonard Burnett, Jr., September 10, 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).

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 Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section
A2014_148_001_001, TRT: 1:29:05 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr. was born on April 18, 1964 in Shaker Heights, Ohio to Charlotte Carter Burnett and Leonard Burnett, Sr. His maternal grandparents, Alee Hunt Carter and Azel Carter, left Virginia to move to the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There, Burnett's grandmother became a hospital nutritionist, and his grandfather worked as a jitney cab driver and a numbers runner. Burnett's father was born in Corpus Christi, Texas to Andrea Hawkins Burnett and Booker Burnett. He graduated from the University of Oregon, and went on to play for the Pittsburgh Steelers. After marrying, Burnett's parents relocated to Cleveland, Ohio, where his father joined the Cleveland Browns. When an injury forced him to retire early, he started an All Pro Fried Chicken franchise, and cofounded Urban Talent Development, Inc. with his friend, Brady Keys, Jr. Burnett's parents raised three sons, and moved the family from Cleveland to Pittsburgh, and later to Detroit, Michigan.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section
A2014_148_001_002, TRT: 2:30:32 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr. began his education at Moreland Elementary School in Shaker Heights, Ohio. After moving to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he attended the Sterrett School, Carlow College Campus School and Sacred Heart Elementary School. He was also involved with Jack and Jill of America, Inc. When his family moved to Detroit, Michigan, Burnett enrolled at Shrine of the Little Flower

High School in Royal Oak, Michigan. Upon graduating, he enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he pledged to the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and tried out for the baseball team. During his sophomore year, Burnett was denied entry into the business school, and decided to transfer to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida. Once there, he befriended Keith Clinkscales, and met students from around the country. Burnett completed internships at the U.S. Home Corporation and IBM, and went on to work as a sales representative for the Baxter Healthcare Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section A2014_148_001_003, TRT: 3:30:16 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr. and his friend, Keith Clinkscales, relocated to New York City in 1986. Burnett worked as a sales representative at the Baxter Healthcare Corporation, and was promoted to regional sales manager within two years. In 1988, Burnett and Clinkscales cofounded Urban Profile magazine. After Clinkscales graduated from Harvard Business School in 1990, Burnett left the Baxter Healthcare Corporation, and they focused on Urban Profile full time. In 1991, the magazine was acquired by Tyrone Taborn's company, Career Communications Group, Inc., and Burnett remained on staff as an account executive. In 1993, Burnett and Clinkscales were hired to work on the newly formed Vibe magazine. There, Burnett sold advertising alongside John Rollins. Because of magazine's hip hop demographic, businesses were initially reluctant to buy advertising space, but Burnett eventually secured clients like Tommy Hilfiger and Levi Strauss and Company. Burnett also remembers working with Emil Wilbekin and Kenard E. Gibbs.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section A2014_148_001_004, TRT: 4:30:44 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr. began working for Vibe magazine in 1993. The publication was affiliated with Time Inc. until 1996, when Robert L. Miller and founder Quincy Jones became the majority owners. In its early years, Vibe magazine had a substantial circulation. After the hiring of editor Alan Light, the magazine tried to appeal to young

white male readers, which alienated African American subscribers. Burnett went on to become the advertising director and publisher of Vibe magazine. However, he and Keith Clinkscales wanted to operate their own magazine, so they resigned in 1999. Their first attempts to attract investors were unsuccessful, but eventually they met Frederick Terrell of Provender Capital Group LLC, who decided to invest in their publishing company, Vanguarde Media. Burnett and Clinkscales then acquired Honey magazine from Harris Publications, Inc., and Heart and Soul and Emerge magazines from Robert L. Johnson at BET. Ultimately, the company was forced into bankruptcy in 2003.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section A2014_148_001_005, TRT: 5:31:34 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr.'s company, Vanguarde Media, declared bankruptcy in 2003. The firm ceased publication of its magazines, including Heart and Soul, Honey and Savoy, and dismissed most of its staff. In the following months, Burnett and his business partner, Keith Clinkscales, received help from Bernard Bronner at Upscale magazine, and attempted to develop a strategy to save Vanguarde Media from bankruptcy. However, they were unsuccessful. Burnett initially considered working for Essence magazine, but decided to found Uptown magazine with Brett Wright instead. They hired writer Myiti Sengstacke Rice, and recruited Harriette Cole as the magazine's first editor in chief. Exclusively funded by Burnett and Wright, Uptown magazine officially launched in 2004. In 2005, Burnett returned to Vibe magazine at investor Robert L. Miller's request. Two years later, he left Vibe to resume his position as the publisher of Uptown magazine. In 2009, Burnett acquired Vibe magazine with funding from InterMedia Partners, LP.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Burnett, Jr., Section A2014_148_001_006, TRT: 6:23:06 2014/09/10

Leonard Burnett, Jr. acquired Vibe magazine in 2009 through the private equity firm InterMedia Partners, LP. During this time, the magazine also received investments from Magic Johnson and Ron Burkle of The Yucaipa Companies, LLC. Burnett served as the publisher of Vibe

and Uptown magazines, and focused on digital branding. Vibe continued to struggle as the magazine industry declined, and Burnett and Wright decided to leave the publication in 2012. However, they retained ownership of Uptown magazine. In 2013, Burnett and Wright founded U Brands, and opened an exclusive, members only club called Uptown House. Burnett also invested in Hype Hair magazine, and started the Notorious POP website, which was dedicated to celebrating African American fathers. Burnett talks about his own father's response to his career path, and reflects upon his career, legacy and life. He concludes the interview by sharing his advice to future generations.