Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Finney, John, 1938-

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John Finney,

Dates: February 11, 2017

Bulk Dates: 2017

Physical Description: 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:51:32).

Abstract: Nonprofit executive John Finney (1938 - ) served as executive director of the Equal Opportunity Authority for Savannah-Chatham County Area Inc. (EOA) from 1973 to 2017. Finney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 11, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2017_054

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive John Finney was born on October 31, 1938, in Savannah, Georgia to Ellis Finney and Margaret Maynor Finney. Upon his graduation from Savannah’s Alfred E. Beach High School in 1957, Finney worked as a medical assistant at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. He later returned to Savannah, where he began his studies at Savannah Stage College. Following his service in the Vietnam War, Finney earned his B.S. degree in sociology in 1967. He went on to receive his M.A. degree in sociology from Clark Atlanta University in 1971.
Finney worked at the NAACP Youth Council, Savannah Branch under the mentorship of Savannah civic leader and historian W.W. Law in the mid-1960s. Finney also worked at the segregated Memorial Medical Center in Savannah and then joined The Economic Opportunity Authority for Savannah-Chatham County Area, Inc. (EOA) in 1967. In 1972, Finney became the acting executive director of the EOA. He and local ministers organized a lunch program in memory of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which inspired the founding of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Day Association. Finney was named the executive director of the EOA the next year, and served in this position until his retirement in 2017. During his tenure as executive director, Finney oversaw the development of Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care, Inc., which served the neighborhood of Woodville in Savannah, Georgia. He also partnered with the United Way to develop a clinic for sickle cell patients at Savannah’s Memorial Health University Medical Center; and provided a range of social services, including the housing facilities of the Tom D. Austin House, the Duffy Street SRO Homeless Shelter and the Peeler House. In the 2000s, Finney organized a program to educate community members about natural gas utility deregulation.

In addition to his work with the EOA, Finney served on the board of the Youth Futures Authority. He was involved in area healthcare initiatives like the Community Cardiovascular Council of Chatham County, Inc. and also worked with the Rape Crisis Center of the Coastal Empire and the Chatham-Savannah Voluntary Action Center, Inc.

Finney’s wife, Gwendolyn Young Finney, passed away on July 1, 2015. They had two children; Jondrea Finney and Sharyn Finney.

John Finney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 11, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John Finney was conducted by Denise Gines on February 11, 2017, in Savannah, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit executive John Finney (1938 - ) served as executive director of the Equal Opportunity Authority for Savannah-Chatham County Area Inc. (EOA) from 1973 to 2017.

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:

Finney, John, 1938-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Finney, John, 1938---Interviews
Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Nonprofit Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_001, TRT: 1:29:04 2017/02/11

John Finney was born on October 31, 1938 in Savannah, Georgia to Margaret Maynor Finney and Ellis Finney. Finney’s mother was born in Hampton County, South Carolina, and moved with her parents to Savannah. There, her mother worked as a domestic, and her father worked as a handyman until securing a position on the Southern Railway. Finney’s father grew up on his family’s farm in central Georgia. After moving to Savannah, he found work at the Southern Cotton Oil Company and was eventually promoted to a supervisor position. Finney’s parents met at a church function in Savannah, and raised him in a multicultural, working class neighborhood with a number of minority-owned businesses. Finney began his education at the all-black Maple Street School, where he developed an interest in art. He went on to attend Cuyler Junior High School, where he continued to explore his artistic abilities and was exposed to authors like William Shakespeare, John Keats and Percy Shelley.

Video Oral History Interview with John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_002, TRT: 2:28:08 2017/02/11

John Finney grew up in an ethnically diverse, working class neighborhood in Savannah, Georgia. The community was supported by a strong minority business district, which included venues like the Star Theater and Dunbar Theater. The business owners invested in the community, and sometimes loaned money to help students attend Savannah State College. During middle school, Finney learned the fundamentals of basketball at the local YMCA.
He became interested in sports, and joined the basketball team at Cuyler Junior High School. Finney also joined the NAACP Savannah Branch Youth Council, where he assisted with voter registration under chapter president W.W. Law. While attending Alfred E. Beach High School, Finney was mentored by his teachers and coaches, who held tutoring sessions during lunch hours and were diligent with discipline. He also belonged to the drama club, and appeared in a production of ‘Wildcat Willie Carves the Turkey’ under the direction of Ella P. Law.

Video Oral History Interview with John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_003, TRT: 3:29:41 2017/02/11

John Finney attended Alfred E. Beach High School in Savannah, Georgia. During the school year and throughout the summer, he delivered the Savannah Morning News and the Savannah Evening Press newspapers. He also attended summer vacation bible school at Savannah’s First Union Baptist Church, and helped his family with chores around the house. After graduating from high school in 1957, Finney moved to New York City to work as a medical assistant at the Hospital for Special Surgery. He later returned to Savannah, where he attended Savannah State College until receiving draft orders from the U.S. military. During the Vietnam War, he was stationed in the South Pacific on Okinawa Island. When Finney returned to the United States in 1964, he resumed his studies at Savannah State College and continued his civic work at the NAACP Savannah Branch, where he was influenced by the leadership of W.W. Law and Hosea Williams.

Video Oral History Interview with John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_004, TRT: 4:29:26 2017/02/11

John Finney returned to the United States from the Vietnam War in 1964, and continued his education at Savannah State College in Savannah, Georgia. While in school, he worked at the Memorial Medical Center, which was a segregated facility. There, Finney challenged a white doctor who refused to operate on a black trauma patient. Although the medical center received federal orders to integrate shortly afterwards, Finney was targeted for reprisal by his supervisors and decided to resign. After earning his degree in 1967, Finney secured a job as a
earning his degree in 1967, Finney secured a job as a counselor at The Economic Opportunity Authority for Savannah-Chatham County Area, Inc (EOA). He later pursued a master’s degree at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. Upon graduating in 1971, he returned to Savannah and continued working for the EOA. During his tenure, one of the biggest EOA initiatives was the development of Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care, Inc., which was built for the underserved neighborhood of Woodville.

Video Oral History Interview with John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_005, TRT: 5:29:27 2017/02/11

John Finney worked at The Economic Opportunity Authority for Savannah-Chatham County, Inc. (EOA) from 1967 to 2017. In 1972, he organized a lunch program with local ministers in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which inspired the founding of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Observance Day Association. Also in the 1970s, the EOA partnered with the United Way to develop a clinic for sickle cell patients at the Memorial Health University Medical Center. In the 2000s, Finney organized a program to educate community members about natural gas utility deregulation. In addition to these programs, the EOA provided a broad range of social services, including housing facilities like the Tom D. Austin House, the Duffy Street SRO Homeless Shelter and the Peeler House. The organization also offered home buyer education classes, and secured over $32 million in mortgage funds for local families. At this point, Finney talks about his board memberships and his plans to develop a multicultural coalition in Savannah.

Video Oral History Interview with John Finney, Section A2017_054_001_006, TRT: 6:25:46 2017/02/11

John Finney talks about his family and faith, and shares a lesson about tolerance that he learned during his childhood. He also reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.