

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nathan Conyers

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Conyers, Nathan, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers,
Dates:	August 19, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:32:10).
Abstract:	Auto sales entrepreneur Nathan Conyers (1932 -) owns Conyers' Riverside Ford and Jaguar dealerships and is the longest serving African American car dealer in the country. With the assistance of Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., Conyers helped forge the National Black Dealers Association and became its first president in 1970. Conyers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 19, 2002, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_149
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nathan G. Conyers, founder and president of Conyers Riverside-Ford, Inc., was born on July 3, 1932, in Detroit, Michigan's "Black Bottom" community during the Great Depression. Nathan Conyers was the fourth of five children and one of four surviving sons of his parents John Conyers, Sr. -- a factory worker and union organizer -- and Lucille Simpson Conyers. Both parents emphasized education and self-reliance. His eldest brother is Michigan Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Conyers graduated from Northwestern High School in 1950. A brief stint with the Army made him realize the importance of education. Attending Wayne State University to earn first a bachelor's and then a law degree, Nathan Conyers passed the Michigan Bar in 1959. He served as a special assistant attorney for Michigan's Attorney General, and as a closing attorney for the Veteran's Administration and the Small Business Administration. In 1960, he went into private practice with the firm of Keith, Conyers, Anderson, Brown and Wahls, P.C., a historic firm that championed civil rights and earned a stellar reputation.

Heeding the lifelong wish of his father that a family business be established, in 1970 Nathan Conyers and his brother John launched Conyer's Ford at 2475 West Grand in inner city Detroit with Nathan Conyers as president. At the time, there were only twenty black-owned dealerships in the United States. With the assistance of Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., Conyers helped forge the National Black Dealers Association and became its first president in 1970. In 1979, Conyers established the Ford Lincoln Mercury Black Dealers Association. In May of that same year, minority dealers met with the goal of leveraging much needed financial support from federal agencies. As a result of this effort, the National Minority Dealership Association was formed. In 1984, Conyers acquired Riverside Ford, Inc. at 1833 East Jefferson and later converted the dealership on West Grand to a body shop.

Known for his thirty-one years of professionalism and distinguished community service, Conyers is the longest

serving African American car dealer in the country. He is the recipient of *Time Magazine's* Quality Dealer Award, and is one of only six businesses to make *Black Enterprise Magazine's* Top 100 list for the last twenty-five years.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nathan Conyers was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 19, 2002, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Auto sales entrepreneur Nathan Conyers (1932 -) owns Conyers' Riverside Ford and Jaguar dealerships and is the longest serving African American car dealer in the country. With the assistance of Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr., Conyers helped forge the National Black Dealers Association and became its first president in 1970.

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:

Conyers, Nathan, 1932-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Conyers, Nathan, 1932---Interviews

African American automobile dealers--Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.

Family-owned business enterprises--Michigan--Detroit.

African American families--Michigan.

Detroit (Mich.)--Social conditions.

Wayne State University.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Riots--Michigan--Deitroit.

Civil rights movement--Michigan--Detroit.

Detroit (Mich.)--Politics and government.

Young, Coleman A.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

African American business enterprises.

Keith, Damon J. (Damon Jerome), 1922-.

Conyers, John, 1929-.

African Americans--Employment.

Discrimination in employment--United States.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Auto Sales Entrepreneur

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Nathan Conyers, August 19, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_001, TRT: 0:29:18 ?
Nathan Conyers begins by describing his family background and sharing stories passed down from his ancestors. Conyers also details his father's work as a union organizer. Conyers shares memories of his childhood neighborhood in the Black Bottom section of Detroit, Michigan, recalling an economically mixed environment with a strong sense of values and solidarity.
African American automobile dealers--Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.
African American lawyers--Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.
Family-owned business enterprises--Michigan--Detroit.
African American families--Michigan.
Detroit (Mich.)--Social conditions.
Wayne State University.
United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.
Riots--Michigan--Detroit.

Civil rights movements--Michigan--Detroit.

Detroit (Mich.)--Politics and government.

Young, Coleman A.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

African American business enterprises.

Keith, Damon J. (Damon Jerome), 1922-.

Conyers, John, 1929-.

African Americans--Employment.

Discrimination in employment--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_002, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Nathan Conyers continues to describe his childhood in the Black Bottom section of Detroit, discussing his childhood personality and his aspiration to become a lawyer. Conyers recalls his education at Northwest High School and Wayne State University, where he earned his bachelor's degree. He describes his stint in the Army, which taught him the importance of education. Conyers explains his subsequent decision to enroll in Wayne State's law school and describes his experience clerking for judges after passing the bar exam.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_003, TRT: 0:30:54 ?

Nathan Conyers details the social and political context of his years as a lawyer in Detroit, explaining how events such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Detroit riots of 1967 created a dynamic legal environment in which politics were paramount. Conyers explains how he was part of the increasing number of black lawyers and judges and describes his work at the law firm of Keith, Conyers, Anderson, Brown and Wahls in Detroit. He also recalls the Department of Justice's investigation of the police raid at the Algiers Motel in Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_004, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Nathan Conyers discusses Detroit politics in the 1960s and 1970s, including the riots of 1967, Martin Luther King Jr.'s visit in 1968, and the changes brought about by Coleman Young's mayoral tenure in the 1970s. Conyers then recalls his transition from his legal career to the automotive industry. He explains how starting the Conyers Ford dealership fulfilled the lifetime dream of his father to have a family-run business, and explains reactions to his leaving the legal profession.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_005, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Nathan Conyers details the growth of his family car dealership, Conyers Ford. He addresses issues of racism and discrimination facing black-owned businesses, and recalls the need for founding organizations such as the National Black Dealers Association, the Ford Lincoln Mercury Black Dealers Association and the National Minority Dealership Association. Conyers describes the growth of Conyers Ford and explains his family's involvement in the business. He also shares his hopes for young black entrepreneurs.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_006, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Nathan Conyers comments on the influence of Coleman Young, Damon Keith, and John Conyers on Detroit's black community, explaining how they and other blacks have permanently changed Detroit for the better. He discusses some of the challenges facing black businessmen today, stressing the need for self-ownership and the avoidance of conglomerates. Conyers also reflects on Motown Records' place in the Detroit community.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan Conyers, Section A2002_149_001_007, TRT: 0:30:49 ?

Nathan Conyers discusses the success of his two present car dealerships and discusses the importance of loyalty customer service in business. Finally, he shares his hopes and concerns for the black community, particularly in business matters, and reflects on his life and career.