

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William E. Lowry, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lowry, William, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr.,
Dates:	February 19, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:35:31).
Abstract:	Foundation executive William E. Lowry, Jr. (1935 -) was the host of Opportunity Line, a weekly Chicago employment program, and was senior advisor to the president of the MacArthur Foundation. Lowry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 19, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_031
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

An African American business executive, William Lowry has achieved an iconic status working with the movers and shakers of Chicago. He was born in the city on February 16, 1935, to William and Camille Lowry, who were both postal workers.

Although a product of a working-class environment, Lowry's parents were encouraged by a teacher to enroll him and his brother, James, into renowned private schools in the city. He attended the University of Chicago Laboratory School for elementary school and also attended two years of high school there before transferring to Francis W. Parker and graduating in 1952.

Upon graduation, Lowry enrolled at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where he received a B.A. in 1956. After graduation, he worked at his high school alma mater, Francis Parker, as an athletic director from 1960 to 1962. In 1963, he began his long and distinguished career in Chicago business, becoming a member of the training program at the Inland Steel Company. During his early years at Inland in the 1960s, Lowry and two other African American businessmen founded the Youth Motivation Program. Bringing men and women from various employment fields to talk to Chicago public school students about career opportunities, the program has addressed more than 1 million students. By this time, Lowry was also working on an M.S. in industrial relations from Loyola University in Chicago, which he received in 1969. It was also through his work with the Youth Motivation Program that he would be tapped to become the host of *The Opportunity Line*, a weekly employment program that first aired on Chicago television station WBBM in 1967. The name of the show was later changed to *Objective: Jobs*, and it aired for twenty-four years.

He would also rise up the ranks at Inland, becoming the company's director of personnel and recruitment before retiring in 1993. In 1994, he became the vice-president of human resources at the Chicago-based MacArthur Foundation, one of the largest foundations in the country. He is the recipient of an Emmy Award and a Peabody

Award for his work on *The Opportunity Line* and has been featured in *Who's Who-Black America and Industry*. Lowry is married and the father of two children, and he lives in Chicago.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William E. Lowry, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 19, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Foundation executive William E. Lowry, Jr. (1935 -) was the host of Opportunity Line, a weekly Chicago employment program, and was senior advisor to the president of the MacArthur Foundation.

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:

Lowry, William, 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lowry, William, 1935---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

Occupations:

Foundation 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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., February 19, 2003. 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 William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. was born on February 16, 1935 in Chicago, Illinois to Camille Caldwell Lowry and William W. Lowry. His father was born in Hollandale, Mississippi in 1906 and his mother was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1910, but both of their families moved to Chicago when they were young and they both attended Wendell Phillips High School. They got married around 1933 and both worked in the post office until their retirements. Lowry grew up on the south end of Washington Park in Chicago, and remembers playing football and baseball in the park safely with other children in the neighborhood. Lowry attended Betsy Ross Elementary School and Sexton Elementary School before a teacher of his, Alice Hudson, recommended that he attend the University of Chicago Laboratory School for ninth and tenth grades, which was initially difficult for him. Lowry remembers working at the Regal Theater in Bronzeville as an usher and runner, and later also working as an usher at the Tivoli Theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_002, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. attended the University of Chicago Laboratory School for ninth and tenth grades and remembers how difficult the school was initially, but how it became a very positive experience for him. Lowry graduated from the Laboratory School in 1950 and enrolled at Francis W. Parker High School, where he continued to grow socially and academically. Lowry played basketball, football, and baseball, and was mentored by his coach and teacher Bernard Negronida. Lowry graduated from Francis W. Parker High School in 1952 and enrolled at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, where he was one of only four black students, to study history and philosophy. During college, he toured with the baseball team and visited Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. In 1954, Lowry was the first African American invited to join the all-white Beta Theta Pi Fraternity, which caused a controversy within the fraternity around the country.

Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_003, TRT: 0:29:05 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. describes the support he received from the Beta Theta Pi Fraternity chapter at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. Despite pressure from members nationwide, Lowry was initiated into the fraternity by a unanimous vote in 1964. Lowry remembers the racism he experienced from other teams and from hotels while on tour with the Kenyon College's baseball team, and recalls being forced to stay at the same settlement houses where Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella stayed while playing in the Major League. Lowry became president of the student body in 1955 and received his A.B. degree in 1956. After experiencing discrimination on the job market, Lowry joined the United States Air Force and served as a radar operator in Texas and Alaska. He married his first wife while living in Alaska, and returned to Chicago after he left the service in 1960. In Chicago, Lowry became a teacher and athletic director at Francis W. Parker High School for two years and was hired by Inland Steel Company in 1962.

Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_004, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. joined Inland Steel Company in 1962 and was the first African American in their management training program. He spent three years in production control before transferring to personnel work, where he stayed until retiring from Inland in 1993. At Inland, Lowry experienced the difficulty of having to terminate employees. In the late 1960s, Lowry was chosen to

participate in Vice-President Hubert Humphrey's "Plans for Progress" Task Force on Youth Motivation and, with William Farrow and Joe Black, he created the Youth Motivation Program at Chicago Public Schools which lasted for thirty years. In 1967, Lowry was chosen to host a local TV show called "The Opportunity Line" that connected Chicago citizens with employment opportunities at the Illinois Department of Labor until 1991. In 1993, Lowry worked for his brother, HistoryMaker James Lowry; and, in 1994, he was hired as Vice President of Human Resources and Administration at The MacArthur Foundation.

Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_005, TRT: 0:31:25 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. reflects on his career at The MacArthur Foundation and how it differs from his experience at Inland Steel Company. He describes his experience on the City-County Taskforce on Welfare Reform, where he observed the education gap that exists within the African American community and how employment disparity is aggravated by lack of accessible jobs. Lowry describes his hope that African Americans will focus less on individual advancement and more on improving their community and other poverty-stricken groups. He ends the interview by reflecting on his legacy and narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with William E. Lowry, Jr., Section A2003_031_001_006, TRT: 0:05:50 ?

William E. Lowry, Jr. continues to narrate his photographs.