

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rufus W. McKinney

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McKinney, Rufus W. (Rufus William), 1930-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney,
Dates:	March 15, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:18:32).
Abstract:	Energy chief executive and nonprofit chief executive Rufus W. McKinney (1930 -) was the vice president of Southern California Gas Company and the co-founder of the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE). McKinney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 15, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_046
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Rufus William McKinney was born in Jonesboro, Arkansas, on August 5, 1930. McKinney was one of twelve children born to his parents, a minister and a homemaker. After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in Jonesboro, McKinney attended Arkansas AM&N College, earning his B.A. in 1953. Upon graduation, he moved to Indiana, where he attended Indiana University and earned his J.D. in 1956. '

Following his graduation from law school, McKinney was hired by the United States Department of Labor as an attorney and adviser. He remained with the Department of Labor for thirteen years and joined Pacific Light Corporation in 1969 as an attorney. Within two year, he had risen to the position of senior attorney. In 1972, McKinney became assistant vice president with Southern California Gas Company, and in 1975 he was named vice president for national public affairs. He remained with Southern California Gas until his retirement in 1992.

McKinney has been active outside of his career as well. While serving with the Department of Labor in 1963, he became the vice president of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the NAACP, a position he held until 1969. During that time he was also active with the National Urban League. In 1977, he co-founded the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE), serving as chairman in 1980, and remaining active on the board of directors since. The AABE is devoted to ensuring that minority voices are heard when energy policy is deliberated. McKinney also serves on the Maryland Commission on Human Relations and is a member of the Epsilon Boule Fraternity. McKinney and his wife, Glendonia, live in Maryland. They have four children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rufus W. McKinney was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 15, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Energy chief

executive and nonprofit chief executive Rufus W. McKinney (1930 -) was the vice president of Southern California Gas Company and the co-founder of the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE).

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:

McKinney, Rufus W. (Rufus William), 1930-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McKinney, Rufus W. (Rufus William), 1930---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

American Association of Blacks in Energy

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief 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 Rufus W. McKinney, March 15, 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 Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Rufus W. McKinney describes his family background. McKinney was born in Jonesboro, Arkansas, on August 5, 1930, as one of twelve children born to George Dallas McKinney, a minister and Rosa Ann Thompson, a homemaker. His father was born near Jackson, Tennessee, grew up in Marianna, Arkansas, and worked as a cobbler and sharecropper in addition to founding the Church of God and Christ Holiness Church in Jonesboro, Arkansas. His mother grew up in Marvell, Arkansas to a family of farmers where she lost many of her siblings at a young age. McKinney's mother encouraged education and wanted him to be a

professor while his father was a hardworking disciplinarian. He describes his childhood as crowded due to his many siblings, and he recalls growing up in the midst of the Great Depression. McKinney describes Jonesboro as a clean, small town of 10,000 where farmers came on the weekends to have fun and remembers the sounds of the Frisco and the Cotton Belt railroad lines that came through town.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_002, TRT: 0:31:23 ?

Rufus W. McKinney describes his childhood and education. McKinney attended a one-room schoolhouse on the North Side of Jonesboro, Arkansas until second grade and then he attended Booker T. Washington School through twelfth grade. McKinney viewed school as an escape from the chores and farm work at home. He missed school to help his father during spring planting season. When his older brother Robert moved to Chicago, Illinois at age sixteen, McKinney had to shoulder additional responsibility on the farm. McKinney's childhood home had no indoor plumbing, and he had to cut railroad crossties to use as firewood. His father was a minister at several Church of God in Christ churches in the Jonesboro area, and McKinney recalls the strict rules and his disagreement with the fundamentalist theology that his other family members embraced. McKinney remembers his favorite teachers at Booker T. Washington School and participating in the New Farmers of America Public Speaking Contest in high school.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_003, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Rufus W. McKinney describes winning third prize in the New Farmers of America Public Speaking Contest in high school. McKinney disobeyed the contest rules by giving a twelve to fourteen minute speech on crop rotation written by his teacher Herbert Smith. The contest was the first time that McKinney visited Arkansas AM&N College where he later attended and where he met Professor Simon Haley, father of Alex and HistoryMaker George Haley. The Jonesboro newspaper wrote about McKinney's third place finish in the national contest. McKinney missed a year of school in 1936 after severing his foot on a broken Coca Cola bottle. McKinney recalls the high attrition rate at Booker T. Washington High School and how graduating was a major accomplishment in the black community. After graduating, McKinney attended Arkansas AM&N College in Pine Bluff on a full scholarship, earning his B.A. degree in 1953. He participated on the college debate team which drew large crowds and prepared him for law school.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_004, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

Rufus W. McKinney married Dorothy Davis prior to his junior year at Arkansas AM&N College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. They had their first son and graduated together in 1953. McKinney worked at Hesston's Grocery during college to provide for his family, and they lived in Quonset huts on campus. McKinney recalls taking a course with Professor Simon Haley. McKinney's interest in law was inspired by black lawyers who defended blacks in civil rights cases. He chose to enroll at Indiana University Maurer School of Law because they provided family housing and a job for his wife with Dr. Joseph Muhler, the dentist who put fluoride in toothpaste. McKinney recounts the racism he and his wife experienced in Bloomington, Indiana where they reserved a hotel room. He discovered that restaurants and hotels would only serve him if he was in the company of white patrons. One of three blacks in his first year class, McKinney

finished fifth in his class of 105 freshmen and was chosen for the law review.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_005, TRT: 0:31:26 ?

Rufus W. McKinney describes attending Indiana University Maurer School of Law. Although he was one of a small number of blacks in his class and struggled during his first semester exams, McKinney rose to the top of his class encountering only one racist professor. Although the famous 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, occurred during his first year of law school, McKinney says that it was not incorporated into their courses. Indiana University under President Herman B. Wells was progressive and welcoming to black students. McKinney approached legal principles like liberty and justice differently from his white counterparts. During law school, McKinney and his wife attended a small, black Baptist church and lived at Hoosier Courts with international students, many of whom were Middle Eastern. He also befriended his law school colleagues including Lee Hamilton. Despite his top academic performance and being on the law review, McKinney struggled to find a job.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_006, TRT: 0:21:26 ?

Rufus W. McKinney describes his career at the United States Department of Labor. Following his graduation from Indiana University Maurer School of Law in 1956, McKinney was hired by the United States Department of Labor initially as an attorney where he remained for thirteen years. During his time there, McKinney worked on a number of projects related to unions, minimum wage, affirmative action, and recruiting black lawyers to join the U.S. Department of Labor. Of the 120 lawyers employed there when McKinney started, only three were black. By the end of his tenure, McKinney, Jim Jones and Howard Jenkins had recruited dozens more. McKinney describes the Philadelphia Plan which used government intervention to open construction contracts to black workers. McKinney's work was also related to two landmark acts: the Welfare and Pension Plans Disclosure Act which created national standards for pensions and the Landrum-Griffin Act which dealt with aspects of union management.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_007, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Rufus W. McKinney worked as Special Assistant to the Secretary of Labor in the U.S. Department of Labor where he served as gatekeeper and worked on the Manpower Program in order to determine who was eligible to work after being arrested for participation in riots. Although others, including Laurence Silberman, encouraged him to stay in protected service, McKinney opted to leave when President Richard Nixon was elected. McKinney moved to California with his family, passed the California Bar Exam, and joined Pacific Light Corporation in 1969 as a regulatory attorney. Within two year, he had risen to the position of senior attorney. McKinney describes how many of the biggest utilities in Southern California were municipally owned and how his company introduced a rate structure that leveled out payments for the customer across seasons. When the energy crisis peaked in the early 1970s, the company transferred him to Washington D.C. to work as a lobbyist.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_008, TRT: 0:31:16 ?

Rufus W. McKinney talks about his twenty year career at Southern California Gas Company. In 1972, McKinney became assistant vice president with Southern California Gas Company and opened their branch in Washington, D.C.

In 1975 he was named vice president for national public affairs. Starting out with only a secretary, the Washington D.C. office grew and McKinney formed relationships with many prominent political figures and their staff including Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Julian Dixon, Merv Dymally, Allen Cranston, Pete Wilson, and Biz Johnson. In order to be an effective lobbyist, McKinney insisted that Southern California Gas Company provide him with expense accounts and country club memberships. Although all of the Presidents were Republicans except for one, the U.S. Congress was controlled by Democrats and McKinney felt that he was successful in advocating for Californians on energy policies. McKinney comments on political scandals including Watergate where his office was housed.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_009, TRT: 0:22:18 ?

Rufus W. McKinney talks about his retirement from Southern California Gas Company in 1992 after twenty years. After his retirement, McKinney worked as a consultant for several years and helped Parris Glendening get elected as Governor of Maryland. McKinney also serves on the Maryland Commission on Human Relations. McKinney wrote his memoirs and enjoys playing golf and poker. While serving with the Department of Labor in 1963, he became the vice president of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the NAACP, a position he held until 1969 where he worked on negotiations with the Mayflower Hotel during Lyndon B. Johnson's inauguration in 1965. In 1977, he co-founded the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE), serving as chairman in 1980, and on the board of directors. McKinney sees the AABE as his legacy. McKinney talks about his parents' pride in his success and his pride in his children and grandchildren.

Video Oral History Interview with Rufus W. McKinney, Section A2003_046_001_010, TRT: ?
Rufus W. McKinney narrates his photographs.