

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Herman Morris, Jr.

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Morris, Herman, Jr., 1951-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 27, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:36:08).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Energy chief executive Herman Morris, Jr. (1951 - ) was the CEO of Memphis Light, Gas & Water. Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 27, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_146
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Herman Morris, Jr. was born on January 16, 1951, in Memphis, Tennessee, where he attended public school. From there, Morris attended Southwestern University at Memphis (Rhodes College), where he earned a B.A. in economics in 1973. He then went on to attend the Vanderbilt University School of Law, earning a J.D. in 1977.

Over the next twelve years, Morris worked in private practice with several Memphis-area law firms handling a wide variety of cases. In 1989, he left his law practice to become the first in-house general counsel for Memphis Light, Gas & Water. There, he initiated the Inner-City Legal Explorer Post in conjunction with the Boy Scouts of America to provide opportunities for inner-city youth to gain exposure to the law and legal careers. In 1997, Morris was promoted to president and CEO of Memphis Light, Gas & Water. In this position, Morris oversees 2,700 employees and a \$1.4 billion budget.

Morris is highly involved in a number of community and professional organizations. Currently, he is a director of the University of Tennessee Medical Group and the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association. In addition, Morris serves on the Advisory Board of Bank of America. He is also the past president of the Memphis Branch of the NAACP, actively involved with the Boy Scouts of America, and has played an instrumental role as the Campaign Chairman of the United Way of the Mid-South. Morris has also been honored with numerous awards, including awards for business as well as his philanthropic contributions.

Morris and his wife, Brenda, live in Memphis.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Herman Morris, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 27, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Energy chief executive Herman Morris,

Jr. (1951 - ) was the CEO of Memphis Light, Gas & Water.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Morris, Herman, Jr., 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Morris, Herman, Jr., 1951---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Lawyer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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## 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 Herman Morris, Jr., June 27, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. was born on January 16, 1951 in Memphis, Tennessee to Herman Morris and Reba Garrett Morris. Morris talks about how he recorded his maternal family background as told by his great aunt who was a teacher and had the same countenance as U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. He describes his great aunt's knowledge of the family history as well as annual family potlucks in her home. On Morris' maternal side, was an ancestor named Passion Finger who was deeded a substantial amount of land in Tippah County, Mississippi by her white employers, the Fingers. After her death, she was buried on the Finger family plot. Morris' maternal grandparents, Viola and George Garrett were born in Mississippi. George Garrett was jailed for killing a white man, but escaped. In 1861, his paternal grandfather, Jeff Morris, was born into slavery in Alabama. He migrated to Memphis in the early 1900s where he worked as a building

porter and married Lottie Morris. Morris' father was a manual elevator operator for Sears, Roebuck & Company. A hard worker who never missed a day of work, he was able to buy a home in the early 1950s.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. describes his parents, Herman and Reba, who met while working at Sears, Roebuck, and Company in Memphis, Tennessee. At Sears, Morris' father was an elevator operator and his mother was a waitress in the cafeteria. Born in rural Tippah County, Mississippi, Morris' mother's parents were sharecroppers and she grew up on a farm. Before working at Sears, she studied cosmetology. As a young boy, Morris and his sister were raised by his maternal grandparents on their farm in Mississippi. He remembers selling bread, hauling water, and picking cotton. After Morris came of school age, he joined his parents in Memphis' Binghampton neighborhood, a poor black community. In Memphis, Morris attended Lester Elementary school and Lester High School where he excelled in standardized testing and was quarterback of the football team. Morris' parents divorced when he was in the sixth grade and he lived with his father, a disciplinarian and a functional alcoholic, while his sister stayed with his mother. He reflects upon their marriage and the impact of their divorce on his childhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. describes his favorite teacher at Lester Elementary School. At Lester High School in Memphis, Tennessee, Morris was quarterback of the football team. He also ran track although he did not focus on his running technique until college when he was inspired by Ukrainian Olympian Valeriy Borzov. Morris competed in the NCAA track meets and set a school record as an undergraduate at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Encouraged by Otto Graham, he also had dreams of playing professional football until he injured his knee during his senior year. Morris entered Rhodes College as a biology major, but ultimately graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics. While at Rhodes, Morris was the president of the Black Student Association. Morris recalls the association's misguided boycott of a conference level track meet in defense of a fellow black student who was accused of plagiarism. Morris' personal reservations about the boycott were confirmed when the student was discovered to be guilty. After graduating from Rhodes in 1973, Morris worked for an African American headhunting firm in Charleston, South Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. decided to attend Vanderbilt Law School in Nashville, Tennessee after a lonely year in Charleston, South Carolina working for an African American headhunting firm. In law school, Morris, along with other members of the newly established Black Law Students Association (BLSA), lobbied for an African American professor. Robert Belton was subsequently hired in 1975. Morris describes a memorable interview and the legal profession's reluctance to hire black lawyers. After graduating from Vanderbilt Law School in 1977, Morris was hired by Ratner, Sugarmon, Lucas, Willis and Caldwell, the first integrated law firm in Memphis, Tennessee. At the firm, Morris worked on school desegregation litigation in St. Louis, Missouri and on an employment discrimination case against Memphis Light, Gas and Water. The latter paved the way for Morris to join Memphis Light, Gas and Water as the utility's first in-house general counsel in 1989 after Morris was pressured by an

African American judge. In 1997, he was promoted to president and CEO by the mayor.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. attended Ball Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Mississippi as a young boy. His grandfather, a deacon, was also carpenter and brick mason who helped build the church. Morris' religious upbringing influenced his personal philosophies and leadership. His core values are good work, growth, fun, and charity. Morris describes his leadership of Memphis Light, Gas, and Water in the winter of 2001 during the natural gas crisis. He talks about the crisis' cause and how the utility company worked to mitigate its impact by implementing a rate reduction and educating consumers on energy conservation. Morris is a member of the National Petroleum Council, an energy think tank formerly headed by Vice President Dick Cheney. Kenneth Lay of Enron also sat on the Council. He discusses the financial feasibility of solar machines and current efforts, like the Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP), to address energy concerns of the poor. Morris also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and his mentor, HistoryMaker Russell Sugarmon.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman Morris, Jr., Section A2003\_146\_001\_006, TRT: 0:06:39 ?

Herman Morris, Jr. talks about his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.