

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cornell McBride, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McBride, Cornell
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr.,
Dates:	March 24, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:45:00).
Abstract:	Corporate chief executive and personal care chief executive Cornell McBride, Sr. (1943 -) started his own hair care product company and co-established M&M Products Company, developing a formula that eventually became Sta-Sof-Fro, the first product to actually soften natural black hair. He later founded McBride Research Laboratories, Inc. McBride was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 24, 2004, in Decatur, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_034
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Cornell McBride, Sr., a pioneer in the black hair care industry, was born on August 14, 1943 in Savannah, Georgia. He is founder, president and CEO of McBride Research Laboratories, Inc. (MRL), which manufactures and distributes hair care products to international markets. McBride was raised in the poor community surrounding a sugar refinery in Savannah where his father worked. After graduating from high school in 1961, he migrated north and worked briefly for a pharmaceutical company. McBride married his high school sweetheart and joined the U.S. Air Force in 1962 and served until 1967. That same year McBride, his wife Harriet and their baby daughter moved back to Georgia. He attended Fort Valley University for three years then transferred to Mercer University in Macon where he earned a B.S. degree from the School of Pharmacy in 1973.

While at Mercer, he and his fellow classmate Therman McKenzie established M&M Products Company, developing a formula that eventually became Sta-Sof-Fro, the first product to actually soften natural black hair. By the mid-1980s, M&M Products had four national brands: Sta-Sof-Fro, Sof-N-Free, Moxie and Curly Perm. The company's annual revenues exceeded \$40 million making it one of the top Black hair care companies in the world. In 1989, after a series of business troubles, McBride and his partner sold M&M Products to Johnson Products.

McBride bounced back from financial decline in 1990 when he established McBride Research Laboratories, headquartered in Decatur, Georgia. McBride has used his talents as a registered pharmacist to develop lines of innovative products called Wave by Design and Design Essentials. His distribution network includes the utilization of product distributors as independent entrepreneurs to take the products directly to beauty salons in the United States, the Caribbean and the United Kingdom

McBride also masterminded the 24-hour beauty salon for athletes during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. He was a founder of the American Health and Beauty Aids Institute (AHBAI) in 1982 and served as chairman of the

organization from 1984 to 1986. He is a member of the Atlanta Business League, International Business Club, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and the Society of Cosmetic Chemists. McBride recently authored *A Cut Above: How Cornell McBride Made Millions in the Hair Care Biz*. The book offers readers a road map for building wealth and stresses the importance of determination, family values, perseverance, goal setting and “giving back” as key components of one’s life.

McBride and his family live in Decatur, Georgia

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Cornell McBride, Sr. was conducted by Clarissa Myrick-Harris on March 24, 2004, in Decatur, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate chief executive and personal care chief executive Cornell McBride, Sr. (1943 -) started his own hair care product company and co-established M&M Products Company, developing a formula that eventually became Sta-Sof-Fro, the first product to actually soften natural black hair. He later founded McBride Research Laboratories, Inc.

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:

McBride, Cornell

Myrick-Harris, Clarissa (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
McBride, Cornell--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Corporate Chief Executive

Personal Care Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|StyleMakers

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 Cornell McBride, Sr., March 24, 2004. 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 Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. was born on August 14, 1943 in Savannah, Georgia. His mother, Thelma McBride, who was of Indian ancestry and Gullah/Geechee heritage, was raised in the coastal region of Savannah and South Carolina. McBride's father was born in Dawson, Georgia to Cecil (ph.) and Mary McBride who were field laborers. McBride was raised with seven siblings in a sugar refinery, a mill town in Savannah where his father worked as a laborer and his mother was employed as a domestic. As a young boy, McBride and his friends played recreational sports and created their own games. He remembers racial tensions and fights with white children in the sugar refinery community who lived on the other side of the train tracks. McBride describes how his father's job loss and encounters with racial discrimination led to his transformation from a family man into an alcoholic. After McBride's father lost his job, the family moved to a different area of Savannah and struggled financially.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. recalls the impact of his father's job loss. The family was forced to move out of the sugar refinery community in Savannah, Georgia and his father struggled to find a job. McBride attended segregated Woodville Elementary School in Savannah, Georgia, which became Tompkins High School. As a young boy, McBride become increasingly rebellious and was often kicked out of school, but he decided to focus on his studies in order to buy a house for his mother and to hold his own among his peers. McBride talks about influential teachers in high school where he played baseball and football. He had early dreams of becoming a chicken farmer and his father's struggles in the workplace fueled McBride's ambition to be an entrepreneur. He especially admired the entrepreneurial spirit of his Uncle Johnnie. McBride also talks about attending Sunday School and leaving Savannah, Georgia for New York City after graduating from high school in 1961.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. moved to New York City, New York in 1961 after graduating from Tompkins High School in Savannah, Georgia. He worked at Davidson Edwards Pharmaceutical Company filling hoppers before he was promoted to run and clean the machines. In 1962, McBride enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. Initially stationed at Lackland Air Force Base, McBride ended up at Plattsburgh Air Force Base as a physical training instructor. McBride and his wife, Harriet, met in high school and had their first child out of wedlock before getting married in 1963. While McBride was in the Air Force, the family struggled to make ends meet. McBride's encounters with housing discrimination in New York eventually led to him having base housing at Plattsburgh Air Force Base. He served in the U.S. Air Force for five years before deciding to continue his education by taking courses at Plattsburgh State College. In 1967, McBride decided to enroll at Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia using the G.I. Bill.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_004, TRT:

0:28:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. transferred from Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia to Mercer University School of Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia in 1970 in pursuit of a shorter program that would allow him to support his family. At Mercer, he convinced two of his classmates from Fort Valley, Therman McKenzie and John Early (ph.), to join him in pharmacy school. In 1973, McBride co-founded M&M Products Company with McKenzie and the two developed the company's first product: Sta-Sof-Fro. McBride describes important mentors who taught him how to market Sta-Sof-Fro during M&M's early years. The company grew rapidly, saturating the market in the southeast before Afro Sheen and Johnson Products realized that M&M was a serious competitor. McBride talks about creative differences with McKenzie who resisted product diversification. In 1979, M&M began expanding into Africa, focusing primarily on South Africa before their products were shunned by boycotts during the Anti-Apartheid Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. talks about M&M Products Company at its peak as well as the challenges of navigating through the company's financial woes after malfunctioning equipment led to two major fires at its manufacturing facilities in the mid-1980s. During the company's financial decline, McBride began to drink more before quitting altogether. In 1990, the M&M Products was sold to Johnson Products Company, founded by HistoryMaker George Johnson. After the company's sale, McBride decided to create another company, launching Design Essentials and Wave By Design in 1991. He describes Design Essentials' distribution system in which he works directly with salons. Under McBride Research Laboratories, McBride has adopted a multi-level marketing model of independent business unit franchises, and manufacturing is outsourced around the country. McBride also talks about working with family members, building his parents a home in 1981, and his desire to help others succeed.

Video Oral History Interview with Cornell McBride, Sr., Section A2004_034_001_006, TRT: 0:21:30 ?

Cornell McBride, Sr. describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also reflects upon how he would like to be remembered, the importance of knowing history, and his legacy. McBride concludes by narrating his photographs.