

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas L. McLeary

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McLeary, Thomas L., 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary,
Dates:	December 10, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:54:45).
Abstract:	Insurance chief executive Thomas L. McLeary (1944 -) co-founded and served as the CEO of Endow, Incorporated, and helped form Premier Network Service Group, the first national African American property, casualty and financial services firm. McLeary was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 10, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_155
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Insurance executive, Chartered Life Underwriter and CEO of Endow, Incorporated, Thomas Livingston McLeary was born on September 8, 1944 in Chicago, Illinois. His mother, Edna Tubbs McLeary and all of her sisters were graduates of Rust College and his father, Thomas Jefferson McLeary, operated a dry cleaners. McLeary attended Doolittle Elementary School and graduated from Englewood High School in 1961. With the help of youth minister Clyde Miller, McLeary received an Illinois General Assembly scholarship, and earned his B.A. degree in psychology from the University of Illinois in 1965.

After graduation, McLeary joined the National Guard and enrolled in Prudential Insurance Company's Management Training Program. McLeary began to appreciate the insurance business as he worked in the Chicago home office from 1965 to 1970. From 1970 to 1977, McLeary moved into Prudential Insurance's Chicago Hyde Park office ins sales. Under the guidance of John Lassiter, a member of Operation Push, McLeary won the Prudential's Agent of the Year Award in 1975 and a President's Citation. McLeary, a Huebner Scholar attended American College and soon qualified as a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU). In 1978, McLeary co-founded Endow, Incorporated as a multi-line insurance company dealing with public entities, small and large corporations and individuals of large net worth. In 1992, he formed with three others, Premier Network Service Group, the first national African American property and casualty and financial services firm.

McLeary is a past president of the Chicago Association of Life Underwriters and the Illinois Association of Life Underwriters (IALU). In 1987, McLeary was awarded the IALU's Distinguished Service Award. A longtime member of the National Minority Business Development Council, McLeary is a member of ABLE and has also been a member of Chicago's Million Dollar Round Table for twenty-four years. McLeary is active on numerous boards and civic committees. He also enjoys working with his wife on various projects to encourage and support young people.

McLeary was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 10, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Thomas L. McLeary was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 10, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Insurance chief executive Thomas L. McLeary (1944 -) co-founded and served as the CEO of Endow, Incorporated, and helped form Premier Network Service Group, the first national African American property, casualty and financial services firm.

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:

McLeary, Thomas L., 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McLeary, Thomas L., 1944- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Insurance Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Thomas L. McLeary, December 10, 2006. 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 Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_001, TRT: 0:28:37 ?

Thomas L. McLeary was born on September 8, 1944 in Chicago, Illinois to Edna Tubbs Johns and Thomas J. McLeary, Jr. McLeary's paternal great-great-grandfather was the son of a slave owner in Madison County, Florida. There, his paternal grandmother, Ruby Alexander McLeary, protested at the segregated

movie theaters, before migrating to Chicago's Englewood neighborhood. McLeary's father was educated through the ninth grade, and owned a dry cleaning business with his brothers. After they lost the business, he worked as a presser at Carson Pirie Scott and Co. McLeary's maternal great-grandfather, a former slave, believed in higher education, and encouraged McLeary's maternal grandmother, Mary Tubbs, to attend Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. McLeary's mother was born in 1912 in Okolona, Mississippi, and moved as a child to Chicago, where her father worked in the stockyards. She went on to graduate from Chicago Teacher's College, and taught at James R. Doolittle Jr. Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Thomas L. McLeary grew up in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois, and attended James R. Doolittle Jr. Elementary School. He played baseball in Washington Park, and basketball on the courts at St. Anselm's School. He was also active at the Church of the Good Shepherd, where he was influenced by youth minister Clyde Miller, as well as the pastor, Reverend Joseph Evans. McLeary was interested in entrepreneurship from an early age. As a child, he sold Christmas cards door to door, and admired his godfather, Leonard J. Livingston, who co-owned the Mammoth Life and Accident Insurance Company. While a student at Englewood High School, McLeary worked after class at his father's dry cleaning shop and a local grocery store. He excelled in science, and aspired to become a physicist upon matriculating at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. McLeary also remembers his high school teacher, Frauline Essex Miller, and vacationing with his family at Paradise Lake in Michigan.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_003, TRT: 0:29:49 ?

Thomas L. McLeary graduated from Englewood High School in 1961, and was persuaded by his mother to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with the aid of the Illinois General Assembly Scholarship. On the segregated campus, McLeary faced racial discrimination from the residents of Champaign, Illinois, and a professor who refused to grade him fairly. In 1963, McLeary's experiences improved as the university recruited more African American students. Upon graduating in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in psychology, McLeary struggled to find work. After six months, he was admitted to the management training program at the Prudential Insurance Company of America on the condition that he join the U.S. Army, although he joined the U.S. National Guard instead. He worked as an underwriter at first, and impressed assistant manager S. Bonenfant Nicholson, Jr., who promoted McLeary to a sales agent position in 1970. McLeary went on to sell insurance to black businesses on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_004, TRT: 0:29:17 ?

Thomas L. McLeary was a successful salesman at the Prudential Life Insurance Company of America. He focused on selling company policies, which were more lucrative than individual insurance products. In 1978, the company changed its insurance policies to include children with preexisting conditions. McLeary threatened to quit, but agreed to stay after obtaining permission to sell other company's products. As McLeary's reputation grew, he established the Endow, Inc. insurance brokerage with his coworker, Ann Smith; and, in 1981, left the Prudential Life Insurance Company of America to open his own office.

McLeary served as the president of the Chicago Association of Life Underwriters, and later the Illinois Life Underwriters Association. Through his work with insurance executive John Lassiter, he became involved with Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's Rainbow PUSH Coalition. He was also a member of the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council alongside businessmen Ralph G. Moore and James Lowry.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_005, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

Thomas L. McLeary was certified as a life insurance underwriter in 1972, through The American College of Financial Services in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Later, McLeary co-founded the Alliance of Business Leaders and Entrepreneurs with Ralph G. Moore and James Lowry. In conjunction with the National Minority Supplier Development Council, the organization strived to secure business for minority companies in Chicago, Illinois. At McLeary's brokerage, Endow, Inc., his clients included the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, the oldest and largest black-owned insurance company. At the time of the interview, McLeary had recently organized their program to sell insurance to black affinity groups. His plans for Endow, Inc. included developing an employee benefits program for historically black colleges and universities, and providing life insurance to all Native American tribes in California. McLeary describes his hiring philosophy, as well as his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas L. McLeary, Section A2006_155_001_006, TRT: 0:27:10 ?

Thomas L. McLeary was involved in community service and mentorship efforts in Chicago, Illinois, where he sponsored basketball and baseball teams' travel to championship games through the YMCA. He also describes his family, including his wife, Elizabeth Sawyer Mcleary, who taught at Chicago Vocational High School; and their three children, Tiffanie McLeary, DeAnna McLeary and Thomas McLeary, who were students at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida. McLeary describes the importance of historically black colleges and universities to the African American business community. He also reflects upon his career, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. McLeary concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.