

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Amy S. Hilliard

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hilliard, Amy S., 1952-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard,
Dates:	July 14, 2008 and November 20, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:10:54).
Abstract:	Marketing executive Amy S. Hilliard (1952 -) was the founder and CEO of the Comfort Cake Company. She worked in multicultural marketing for the Pillsbury Company, The Gillette Company and L'Oreal, and founded a marketing firm called The Hilliard Group, Inc. Hilliard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 14, 2008 and November 20, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_082
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Marketing executive Amy Sharmane Hilliard was born Audrey Sharmane Amy Hilliard on August 16, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan. Hilliard received her B.S. degree (with honors) from Howard University in 1974 and her M.B.A. from Harvard Business School in 1978.

After school, Hilliard went to work for Bloomingdale's as a member of their buying team in New York. In 1981, Hilliard joined the Gillette Company in the Personal Care Division working in Product Management. She led the team that successfully created and launched White Rain Shampoo in six months. In addition, Hilliard managed the development and execution of the multiple brand Miss America promotion during this period. By 1985, Hilliard was promoted to Senior Product Manager for Gillette at Division Headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts. She was responsible for the general management of Gillette's largest personal care business, the \$100 million White Rain hair care products franchise. In 1987, Hilliard became the Director of Marketing for the Lustrasilk Corporation (a Gillette subsidiary) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In Minneapolis, Hilliard left Gillette in 1990 to work for The Pillsbury Company where, as the Director of Market Development, Baked Goods Division, she helped create some of the first Pillsbury Doughboy advertisements that were targeted to people of color. In 1992, Hilliard began working for the Burrell Communications Group in Chicago, Illinois as Senior Vice President and Director of Integrated Marketing Services. Burrell Communications Group specializes in developing advertising and marketing campaigns targeting African American consumers and the urban market. Hilliard then founded The Hilliard Group, Inc. in 1995 and served as its President and CEO. The Hilliard Group specialized in developing multi-cultural marketing and sales strategies for Fortune 500 corporations. In 1999, Hilliard became Senior Vice President of Marketing for Soft Sheen Products, a Division of L'Oreal U.S.A. While still working at L'Oreal, Hilliard made the decision to go into business for herself. Hilliard founded The Comfort Cake Company on February 15, 2001 and serves as its president and CEO. By 2002, The Comfort Cake Company had expanded into the Chicago Public School system cafeterias, and by 2003, Comfort Cakes were being sold on Amazon.com and in

7-Eleven stores.

Formerly an adjunct professor at DePaul University's business school, Hilliard has lectured at leading universities including Harvard, The University of Chicago, Northwestern, Duke and UCLA. She has consulted internationally in London and in South Africa, where she presented business development opportunities to President Nelson Mandela's cabinet. Her work has been profiled in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Ad Age*, *Business Week*, *Working Woman*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, *Essence*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Ebony* among others. In 2005, Hilliard published a book entitled, *Tap Into Your Juice: Find Your Gifts, Lose Your Fears, Build Your Dreams*.

Hilliard is the proud mother of two active teenagers, Angelica and Nicholas.

Hilliard was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 14, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Amy S. Hilliard was conducted by Denise Gines and Larry Crowe on July 14, 2008 and November 20, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Marketing executive Amy S. Hilliard (1952 -) was the founder and CEO of the Comfort Cake Company. She worked in multicultural marketing for the Pillsbury Company, The Gillette Company and L'Oreal, and founded a marketing firm called The Hilliard Group, 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:

Hilliard, Amy S., 1952-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hilliard, Amy S., 1952- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Marketing 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 Amy S. Hilliard, July 14, 2008 and November 20, 2008. 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 Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_001_001, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Amy S. Hilliard was born on August 16, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to Gwendolyn Russell Hilliard and Stratford Hilliard. Hilliard's maternal great-grandmother, Eliza Smith, was a sharecropper in Eufaula, Alabama, where she raised four daughters, including Hilliard's grandmother, Gussie Smith Russell. After studying at the Tuskegee Institute, Hilliard's maternal grandmother moved north with her sisters. She found work at a newspaper in East Chicago, Indiana, and married Hilliard's maternal grandfather, Genese Russell. Together, they raised three daughters, including Hilliard's mother, who earned a master's degree from Wayne State University, and became a nurse in Detroit. Hilliard's paternal grandfather, James Hilliard, Sr., learned to cook from his wife, Hilliard's grandmother Minnie King Hilliard. They trained executive chefs at hotels throughout the South, and raised thirteen children, including Hilliard's father. He graduated from the Tuskegee Institute, and went on to join the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Amy S. Hilliard grew up in Detroit, Michigan, where she was the second of four daughters born to her parents, Gwendolyn Russell Hilliard and Stratford Hilliard. Hilliard began her education at her mother's nursery school; and, in 1957, enrolled at Detroit's Roosevelt Elementary School, where she enjoyed all of her classes. She joined the typing team with her mother's encouragement, and she was also influenced by her teacher, Pearl Cleage, who became a noted author. Hilliard was raised in a predominantly black and middle class neighborhood, where she was exposed to numerous African American professional role models. She witnessed the growth of the black-owned Motown Records company, and remembers seeing members of the Supremes, the Temptations and the Miracles near the Hitsville U.S.A. recording studios on West Grand Boulevard. Hilliard was also acquainted with the father of singer Aretha Franklin, Reverend C.L. Franklin, who lived a few blocks from her home.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_001_003, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Amy S. Hilliard was raised in Detroit, Michigan, where her father, Stratford Hilliard, worked as a medical laboratory technician at the Herman Kiefer Hospital. Her family belonged to Detroit's Grace Episcopal Church, where she and her older sister, Pamela Hilliard Owens, were active with the Episcopalian Youth Churchgoers. The congregation's pancake suppers were sometimes visited by traveling saleswomen from the Aunt Jemima syrup company. After Hilliard completed elementary school, the City of Detroit implemented a school integration plan, and she was bused to the majority-white Eugenia Mettetal Junior High School. There, Hilliard was the only black student in her class, and once confronted a teacher for refusing to call on her. She befriended her white peers, who were predominantly Jewish; but faced discrimination from their parents. During this time, Hilliard was active with her Girl Scout troop; and, to

earn spending money, worked as a babysitter and library page, and sold homemade rosewater perfume.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Amy S. Hilliard attended Eugenia Mettetal Junior High School in Detroit, Michigan, where she was the first African American member of the student council and the first black vice president of a graduating class. Around the time of her enrollment at Detroit's Cass Technical High School in 1967, Hilliard witnessed the riots that destroyed the black business district on 12th Street. Her freshman year was also marked by the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the spring of 1968. During her time at Cass Technical High School, Hilliard was a member of the debate team, and the youth fashion board at the J.L. Hudson Company department store. Upon graduating in 1970, she accepted a full scholarship to Howard University, where she was influenced by the leadership of President James Cheek. Hilliard also participated in the Civil Rights Movement in Washington, D.C., where she protested against segregation, and attended Minister Louis Farrakhan's speeches at the Cramton Auditorium.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_001_005, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Amy S. Hilliard attended Howard University, where she joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Upon graduating in 1974, she was hired as the assistant to Bloomingdale's fashion buyer Elaine Monroe; and then, from 1975 to 1977, she worked at the May Merchandising Corporation in New York City. During this time, she lived near Central Park, and attended dinner parties hosted by Calvin Klein. Hilliard then enrolled at the Harvard Business School, where she was influenced by marketing professor Steve Starr and retail professor Claudine B. Malone. During the summer, Hilliard completed an internship under CEO Ed Ney at the Young and Rubicam advertising firm, where she was then offered a full time marketing position. However, after earning her M.B.A. degree, Hilliard was convinced to return to the retail industry by her classmate, Andrew Traub, whose father was Bloomingdale's Chairman Marvin Traub. Hilliard also remembers the murder of her coworker and friend, Linda Boyd.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_002_006, TRT: 0:30:08 ?

Amy S. Hilliard graduated in 1974 from Howard University in Washington, D.C. She worked in New York City's fashion retail industry for two years, and then enrolled at the Harvard Business School in 1976. Upon earning an M.B.A. degree, Hilliard became a fashion buyer at Bloomingdale's headquarters in New York City. After experiencing a robbery, she requested a transfer to Boston, Massachusetts, but was unable to obtain a marketing position there. Instead, Hilliard joined The Gillette Company, where she began her career in brand management. She assisted with the acquisition of the black-owned Lustrasilk Corporation; and, in 1987, moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota as the brand's marketing director. When The Gillette Company closed the Lustrasilk plant, Hilliard decided to leave the company. She sold Mary Kay cosmetics for a time with her sister, Gloria Hilliard Banks; and was then hired to develop a multicultural marketing program for the Pillsbury Company, LLC.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_002_007, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Amy S. Hilliard was hired in 1990 to develop a multicultural marketing program for the Pillsbury Company, LLC. She created the company's first advertisement featuring a black family, and led an initiative to promote understanding of African American cuisine with the help of experts like culinary historian Jessica B. Harris. In 1992, Hilliard moved with her family to Chicago, Illinois, where she was hired by Thomas J. Burrell to consolidate his marketing, promotion and public relations firms into the Burrell Communications Group. After one year,

Hilliard more than doubled the value of the business, and decided to found the Hilliard Jones Marketing Group as a joint venture with Burrell. She attracted clients like American Express and IBM, and created marketing programs to appeal to black consumers. Due to the strain of frequent travel, Hilliard decided to leave the firm, and became the senior vice president of marketing for Soft Sheen Products, Inc. following its acquisition by L’Oreal S.A.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_002_008, TRT: 0:30:38 ?

Amy S. Hilliard worked as a senior vice president of Soft Sheen Products, Inc. following its acquisition by L’Oreal S.A. During this time, she often conflicted with the corporation’s research and development team, who were attempting to modify the Soft Sheen line based on white consumer preferences. Hilliard was offered the marketing directorship of L’Oreal S.A.’s black hair division in 2000, but left to found the Comfort Cake Company, LLC, which sold pound cakes to grocery stores and other commercial retailers. When the bakery that produced her cakes went bankrupt, Hilliard received assistance from her first customer, United Airlines, to find a new supplier. She went on to write ‘Tap into Your Juice: Find Your Gifts, Lose Your Fears, and Build Your Dreams,’ which was endorsed by Michelle Obama during Barack Obama’s campaign for the U.S. Senate. Hilliard also talks about her children, Angelica Jones and Nicholas Jones, and their roles at the Comfort Cake Company, LLC.

Video Oral History Interview with Amy S. Hilliard, Section A2008_082_002_009, TRT: 0:17:05 ?

Amy S. Hilliard talks about her plans for the future of the Comfort Cake Company, LLC. She also reflects upon her life and legacy, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. In addition, Hilliard talks about her family, including her parents, Gwendolyn Russell Hilliard and Stratford Hilliard, both of whom were living at the time of the interview; her sisters, Pamela Hilliard Owens, Gloria Hilliard Banks and Wendy Hilliard Mensah; and her children, Angelica Jones and Nicholas Jones. Hilliard concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.