

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Fay Ferguson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ferguson, Fay H., 1951-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Fay Ferguson,
Dates:	August 27, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:30:09).
Abstract:	Advertising chief executive Fay Ferguson (1951 -) served as an account executive with the Leo Burnett Company and went on to become co-chief executive officer of Burrell Communications Group. Ferguson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 27, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_247
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Advertising chief executive Fay Ferguson graduated magna cum laude with her B.A. degree in English, speech, and drama from Concordia College in Minnesota in 1973. She then received her M.B.A. degree from Indiana University in 1978

After graduation, from 1974 to 1976, Ferguson taught eighth grade English for two years in Michigan City, Indiana. She began her advertising career in 1978 at the Leo Burnett Company and progressed from an account management trainee to account executive. While there, Ferguson coordinated marketing and advertising campaigns for several Pillsbury Company products, including the refrigerated dinner rolls, the sweet rolls, the turnovers, and the slice'n bake cookies. Ferguson then served as senior account executive at Bozell & Jacobs, Inc. where she managed the Alberto Culver account and oversaw the national rollout of their premier line, Mrs. Dash and Alberto Mousse. In March of 1984, Ferguson joined Burrell Communications Group as an account supervisor. She was promoted to vice president in 1986 and became an account director in 1988. After being promoted to management supervisor in 1992, Ferguson was named client service director in 1993 and managed the company's accounts with the Procter & Gamble Company and the McDonalds Corporation. In addition, she served as co-chair of the new business committee for Burrell Communications Group. In November of 1997, Ferguson became the managing partner of account management and operations. Later, Ferguson was appointed as co-CEO of Burrell Communications Group.

Ferguson has been active on several boards, including the Perspectives Charter School, the Chicago Advertising Federation, The Chicago Network, the North Shore Chapter of the Links, Inc., the American Association of Advertising Agencies – Purple Forum, and the Economic Club of Chicago. She was appointed to the advisory board at Turner Patterson, LLC. In addition, she co-chaired the advertising book benefit for the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools.

Ferguson has received numerous awards, including the “Advertising Working Mother of the Year, Trailblazer Mom” award from *Working Mother* magazine, and the Target Market News “Advertising Executive of the Year MAAX” award. She was also recognized the “Most Influential Woman” award from the Women’s Leadership Federation; the “Outstanding Women in Marketing Communications” award from *Ebony* magazine; and the “Advertising Woman of the Year Award” from The Women’s Advertising Club of Chicago and the Chicago Advertising Federation.

Fay Ferguson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 27, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Fay Ferguson was conducted by Anthony Poole on August 27, 2013, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Advertising chief executive Fay Ferguson (1951 -) served as an account executive with the Leo Burnett Company and went on to become co-chief executive officer of Burrell Communications Group.

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:

Ferguson, Fay H., 1951-

Poole, Anthony (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ferguson, Fay H., 1951- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Leo Burnett Company

Occupations:

Advertising Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|MediaMakers

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 Fay Ferguson, August 27, 2013. 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 Fay Ferguson, Section A2013_247_001_001, TRT: 1:29:20 ?

Fay Ferguson was born on December 6, 1951 in La Porte, Indiana to Eva Mae Holifield Holmes and John Holmes. Her maternal grandfather, James Holifield, was the adopted son of former slaves who settled in Alabama. There, he met Ferguson's maternal grandmother, Liz Massey, with whom he raised a family and maintained a farm. Ferguson's father came from Greenfield, Mississippi, and migrated north to Chicago, Illinois, where he met her mother and worked on the South Shore Line railroad. Ferguson's parents divorced when she was two years old; and, from that time, she was raised by her mother in La Porte. There, Ferguson lived in a majority-white neighborhood, where her family belonged to the St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church. She and her five siblings were the only African American students at St. John's Lutheran School. She reflects upon her experiences growing up in a white community, and talks about her early interest in athletics.

Video Oral History Interview with Fay Ferguson, Section A2013_247_001_002, TRT: 2:31:25 ?

Fay Ferguson completed the eighth grade at St. John's Lutheran School in La Porte, Indiana, where she was the only African American student in her class. She went on to attend Central Junior High School, a public school in La Porte, where she had black classmates for the first time. At LaPorte High School, Ferguson received high grades and was inducted to the National Honors Society. Wanting to leave Indiana after graduating from high school in 1970, Ferguson enrolled at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where she joined a small black community on campus. Influenced by the works of James Baldwin, Ferguson wore an Afro and helped her fellow minority students cope with the transition to small town life. Upon receiving a bachelor's degree from Concordia College, she became a teacher at Elston Middle School in Michigan City, Indiana. Ferguson taught for two years, and then decided to pursue an M.B.A. degree at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Fay Ferguson, Section A2013_247_001_003, TRT: 3:29:01 ?

Fay Ferguson studied marketing at the Indiana University School of Business in Bloomington, Indiana. She also completed a summer internship at the Xerox Corporation, where she focused on market research. After graduating with an M.B.A. degree in 1978, Ferguson was recruited to join the Leo Burnett Company Inc. in Chicago, Illinois. She successfully completed the eighteen-month training program, and was promoted to manage the firm's account with Pillsbury Company, LLC. At this point in the interview, Ferguson describes the process of creating an advertisement campaign, which involved multiple rounds of critique before the pitch to the client. Ferguson was later recruited by Bozell and Jacobs, Inc., where she was tasked with redeveloping the Alberto Culver Company's VO5 hair care brand. After several years at Bozell and Jacobs, Inc., Ferguson was recruited by black advertising executive Thomas J. Burrell. She joined the Burrell Communications Group as its first professional marketer in 1984.

Video Oral History Interview with Fay Ferguson, Section A2013_247_001_004, TRT: 4:28:11 ?

Fay Ferguson accepted an account supervisor position at the Burrell Communications Group, a black-owned advertising agency that specialized in marketing to minority communities, in 1984. At the firm, Ferguson's first client was the Procter and Gamble Company's Crest toothpaste brand. As a result of

her successful campaigns, the firm's chief executive and founder, Thomas J. Burrell, was named the advertising person of the year. Following the growth of the Burrell Communications Group in the 1990s, Ferguson was promoted to director of client services. In this role, she mentored account directors and managed major clients like the Exxon Mobil Corporation, McDonald's Corporation, The Coca-Cola Company and the Kellogg Company. In 2004, Thomas J. Burrell retired, and Ferguson was named the co-CEO of the Burrell Communications Group alongside McGhee Williams Osse. At this point in the interview, Ferguson reflects upon her experiences at the Burrell Communications Group and the legacy of its founder.

Video Oral History Interview with Fay Ferguson, Section A2013_247_001_005, TRT: 5:32:12 ?

Fay Ferguson became the co-CEO of the Burrell Communications Group in 2004, alongside her business partner, McGhee Williams Osse. At this point in the interview, Ferguson talks about the challenges of advertising in the digital age, and her strategies for marketing to the African American community. She also highlights African American women in executive positions, like Esther "E.T." Franklin and Michelle Flowers Welch. Ferguson reflects upon her career in the marketing industry, and her legacy at the Burrell Communications Group. She also talks about her family, her hopes and concerns for the African American community and the importance of healthy living.