

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marcellus Alexander, Jr.

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Alexander, Marcellus, Jr., 1951-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr.,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | December 2, 2013  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2013  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:25:27).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Television executive Marcellus Alexander, Jr. (1951 - ) has worked in television and radio for over thirty years. He serves as executive vice president of television for the National Association of Broadcasters and as president of the NAB Education Foundation. Alexander was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2013_338   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Television executive Marcellus Winston Alexander, Jr. was born on October 3, 1951 in Austin, Texas to Juanita Smith and Marcellus Alexander. In 1973, he graduated with his B.S. degree in speech and journalism from Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

In 1982, Alexander was hired as a general sales manager at the then-American Broadcasting Company owned and operated station WRIF-FM in Detroit, Michigan. In 1984, he was promoted to vice president and general manager of WRIF-FM. Then, in 1986, Alexander helped organize an investor group that purchased WRIF from Cap Cities/ABC, while also serving as chief operating officer of Silver Star Communications in Detroit. From 1987 to 1989, he worked as station manager and acting general manager of KYW-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. From 1989 until 1999, Alexander served as vice president and general manager of Baltimore, Maryland's WJZ-TV, where he expanded the local news, brought back the Baltimore Orioles broadcasts, and through a network affiliation change, sustained WJZ's market dominance. In 1999, Alexander returned to KYW as vice president and general manager, where he served until 2002. While at KYW, he improved the station's news product, revitalized sales and strengthened its ties to the community. In 2002, Alexander was named executive vice president of television for the National Association of Broadcasters. His responsibilities included growing TV's membership, as well as overseeing the Futures Summit, Small Market Exchange, account executive webcasts and key events and sessions at the NAB Show. In 2004, Alexander was named president of the National Association of Broadcasters Education Foundation (NABEF).

Alexander has served on the boards of numerous organizations, including the Baltimore Urban League, the Advertising Association of Baltimore, the Kennedy Institute, and the Advertising and Professional Club. He has been a member of the National Association of Black Journalists since 1987. Alexander has also received many awards and honors for his work. In 1991, he received both the Distinguished Black Marylander Award from

Towson State University, and the Humanitarian Award from the Juvenile Diabetes Association. In 1994, his alma mater presented him with its Distinguished Alumni Award; and, in 1995, he received an honorary doctorate degree from Western Maryland College.

Marcellus Alexander was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 2, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 2, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television executive Marcellus Alexander, Jr. (1951 - ) has worked in television and radio for over thirty years. He serves as executive vice president of television for the National Association of Broadcasters and as president of the NAB Education Foundation.

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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:

Alexander, Marcellus, Jr., 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Alexander, Marcellus, 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:

Television Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Marcellus Alexander, Jr., December 2, 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).

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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 Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_001, TRT:

1:29:42 ?

Marcellus Alexander was born December 3, 1951 in Austin, Texas. His mother, Juanita Rosa Smith-Alexander, was born June 18, 1928 in Jennings, Louisiana. Her family migrated to Austin in the 1940s and she worked as a childcare center administrator in Texas for several years. Alexander's maternal grandmother, Irene Smith, was born in 1903 in Jennings, Louisiana, and his paternal grandfather, Oliver Smith, was born in Arnaudville, Louisiana in 1891. Irene Smith was a homemaker, and Oliver Smith worked as a plumber. Alexander's father, Marcellus Alexander, Sr., was born July 24, 1917 in Austin, Texas. Alexander's paternal grandparents, Milton Everett Alexander and Velma McNeil-Alexander, owned seventy-three acres of dairy farm in Austin. Alexander describes his parents' personalities, his siblings, and his elementary school experience at the Pilot Knob School in Creedmoor, Texas. He was one of the first students to integrate Del Valle Middle School in Del Valle, Texas in the seventh grade.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:05 ?

Marcellus Alexander talks about his interests as a child. As a boy, he wanted to be a U.S. Navy pilot. He remembers visiting his cousins on the Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin, Texas and watching planes takeoff. Alexander integrated Del Valle Junior High School in 1963 with two other black students, though he does not recall having any difficult experiences. Alexander liked learning, and his strengths were in reading and writing. His family attended Ebenezer Baptist Church in Austin. In 1965, Alexander went to Del Valle High School in Del Valle, Texas where he played on the basketball team and was the statistician for the football team. He talks about working on his family's dairy farm, and the night of his high school graduation in 1969. While listening to the radio and watching TV in the 1960s, he noticed there was little programming for people of color. As a high school student, Alexander decided that he did not want to farm, and that he wanted to go to college.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:11 ?

Marcellus Alexander enrolled at Southwest Texas State University, now Texas State University, in San Marcos, Texas in 1969, and majored in speech communications. The school had no black professors and a black population of less than five percent, though Alexander recalls little racial tension. In college, Alexander and his peers formed a black student social and service organization called Umoja, and a choir called the Soul Searchers. Alexander also helped establish the school's first Omega Psi Phi Fraternity chapter and also wrote for the school paper and yearbook. After becoming his family's first college graduate in 1973, he began working at the Dallas American Heart Association where he was quickly promoted to a consultant on state public relations; he describes the adversity he experienced from his colleagues. After a presentation at the Michigan Heart Association's annual meeting, Alexander offered a radio sales trainee position at the station in Detroit, Michigan. He talks about his work ethic at WRIF.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:22 ?

Marcellus Alexander talks about working in sales at the WRIF radio station in Detroit, Michigan, and his transition from sales trainee to chief executive officer and co-owner. While at WRIF, Alexander was encouraged to consider a managerial position by his friend and mentor, Ernie Fears, an African American

general manager of an ABC radio station in Washington, D.C. In 1982, Alexander was promoted to general sales manager at WRIF. In 1984, he was promoted again to vice president. Alexander talks about firing employees, changes in the radio business, and the culture of Detroit in the 1980s. In 1986, Alexander partnered with other minority investors to purchase WRIF. Though he became CEO, he left the station in 1987 due to internal issues. Alexander then accepted an offer from Group W Television to be a station manager, relocating to KYW-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was then promoted to general manager of WJZ-TV in Baltimore, Maryland. Alexander talks about the introduction of cable in the 1980s.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:50 ?

Marcellus Alexander relocated to Baltimore, Maryland to work as the general manager of WJZ Television. At the time, WJZ-TV was competing against local networks to become the first station in Baltimore with a functioning news helicopter. Alexander was instrumental in building the WJZ-TV news helicopter, the Sky High Chopper Thirteen. He describes the helicopter's construction process, and WJZ-TV's victory. He also talks about his managing philosophy, and his belief in engaging with the community and his staff. In partnership with Morgan State University in Baltimore, WJZ-TV adopted Northern High School and revised programming at the school to improve student performance and parent participation. In the 1990s, WJZ-TV lost its affiliation with ABC and became re-affiliated with the CBS network. Alexander describes the station's transition and the entry of FOX as a major television network as well as television and radio ratings.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:32 ?

Marcellus Alexander describes the role of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) in television. He explains the measurement of television ratings and how they are used to determine television programming. He also talks about the underrepresentation of people of color in television rating samples and the longevity of local radio programming. Alexander returned to KWTY-TV in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1999 as the station's vice president and general manager. In 2002, he joined the NAB as Executive Vice President of Television and as the President of the NAB Education Foundation. The NAB Education Foundation provides minority programming like the Media Sales Institute program which allows college graduates interested in media sales to present to recruiters from companies with available entry-level positions. Alexander also talks about issues in the radio and television broadcasting industry like the television's retransmission consent structure and radio's Performance Rights Act.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_007, TRT: 7:26:51 ?

Marcellus Alexander talks about significant developments in television and cable between 2000 and 2010 including the impact of the Federal Communications Commission's mandated switch from analog television to digital television in 2009. He talks about how the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) mediated the transition, and the federal government's role in the process. Alexander talks about the potential for minorities in digital television and the internet's impact on the television industry. He describes the success of the Bounce television network for African Americans as well as unique ways to make low-cost digital television networks in the future.

Alexander considers his professional legacy and what he would have done differently in his career. He talks about his children and his future hopes for television and the black community. He also describes how he would like to be remembered and thanks his family for working to mapping out the family history.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcellus Alexander, Jr., Section A2013\_338\_001\_008, TRT: 8:05:54 ?

Marcellus Alexander narrates his photographs.