

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Truman K. Gibson, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gibson, Truman K. (Truman Kella), 1912-2005
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr.,
Dates:	June 17, 2003 and May 20, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002 and 2003
Physical Description:	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:07:49).
Abstract:	Lawyer, presidential advisor, and boxing promoter Truman K. Gibson, Jr. (1912 - 2005) was a member of Truman's Black Cabinet. Gibson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 17, 2003 and May 20, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_079
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer, boxing promoter and entrepreneur Truman K. Gibson, Jr. was born on January 22, 1912 in Atlanta, Georgia. In an effort to flee the race-related violence of the South, the Gibson family relocated to Columbus, Ohio in the early 1920s. Truman Gibson, Jr. attended Columbus' predominantly white East High School. He went on to study political science at the University of Chicago where he roomed with Benjamin O. Davis, the first Black general in the Air Force. After graduating in 1932, Gibson remained at the University of Chicago to pursue a law degree, which he received in 1935.

From 1935 to 1940, Gibson practiced law in Chicago. In 1940, he became the assistant to William H. Hastie, aide to U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson. In 1943, Gibson became aide to Henry Stimson. Gibson was then appointed to President Harry S. Truman's Advisory Committee on Universal Military Training in 1946. The committee's findings greatly influenced President Truman's landmark decision to desegregate the military. In 1947, Gibson became the first African American to be honored with the Medal of Merit Award for Civilians.

After helping Joe Louis with tax problems in 1949, Gibson took on the role of director and secretary of Joe Louis Enterprises and entered the world of professional boxing as a manager and promoter. He was the first black boxing promoter and Secretary of the International Boxing Club. In 1959, Gibson became one of the three original directors of the Chicago-based National Boxing Enterprises, the company that brought the legendary Friday night fights to television.

By the early 1960's Gibson abandoned boxing and went into private practice. Since then, he has faced numerous legal battles of his own. These entanglements have not prevented Gibson from remaining an active and respected member of the Chicago legal and business communities. Over the years, he has worked with the School for Automotive Trades in Chicago, and acted as Secretary of the Chicago Land Clearance Commission. He served on the boards of directors of the Chicago Community Fund and Roosevelt University and has been a member of the Cook County Bar Association. His friends and associates have included Thurgood Marshall, Duke Ellington,

Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. Gibson continues to reside in Chicago and practice law. He is the sole survivor of President Truman's "Black Cabinet."

Gibson passed away on December 23, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe and Warner Saunders on June 17, 2003 and May 20, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lawyer, presidential advisor, and boxing promoter Truman K. Gibson, Jr. (1912 - 2005) was a member of Truman's Black Cabinet.

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:

Gibson, Truman K. (Truman Kella), 1912-2005

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Saunders, Warner (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gibson, Truman K. (Truman Kella), 1912-2005--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Lawyer

Presidential Advisor

Boxing Promoter

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers|SportsMakers

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 Truman K. Gibson, Jr., June 17, 2003 and May 20, 2002. 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 Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_001, TRT: 0:30:59 ?

Truman K. Gibson describes his family background. His mother, Alberta Dickerson, was born in Jersey City, New Jersey in the late 1800s. She met her husband, Truman K. Gibson, Sr., as a student in one of his classes at an Episcopalian school in Georgia. Gibson, Sr., was born in Macon, Georgia in 1882 to a mother of African American, Indian, and Caucasian descent. Gibson, Sr., began his undergraduate studies at Clark Atlanta University, and completed them at Harvard University in 1909. Dickerson and Gibson gave birth to Truman K. Gibson, Jr. on January 22, 1912 in Atlanta, Georgia. The family moved to Columbus, Ohio in 1921 to escape the Atlanta Race Riots. As a child, Gibson, Jr. enjoyed visiting his grandmother in Macon, Georgia, who lived near Ned Beasley, son of Dr. Edward W. Beasley. Gibson, Jr. also had a lawn mowing business as a youth. He attended East High School, and graduated from there in 1929. He then enrolled at the University of Chicago, where he roomed with General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

At the University of Chicago, Truman K. Gibson roomed with General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., and had few black classmates, including attorney William Ming. After graduating from there in 1932, Gibson enrolled in the University of Chicago Law School. Here, he interviewed politicians for Howard Foote Gosnell's book 'Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics and Chicago'. Judges Irvin Mollison and William L. Dawson helped Gibson secure his first job after he graduated with his J.D. degree in 1935. Other prominent Chicago African American lawyers of the 1930s, included Earl Dickerson, Edward Morris, and C. Francis Stradford. In 1939, Gibson was appointed as the Executive Director of the 1940 American Negro Exposition, where he met Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz and Paul Robeson, who possessed an infectious sense of humor. The exposition featured contributions from Robeson, Arna Bontemps, and Langston Hughes. In 1940, Gibson also examined contracts for the Hansberry v. Lee restrictive covenant case.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_003, TRT: 0:31:26 ?

In 1940, Truman K. Gibson worked on the Hansberry v. Lee case, which was brought after Carl Hansberry, an African American real estate broker, bought a home on Chicago's South Side affected by racially restrictive covenants. The case motivated "white flight" on Chicago's South Side. Gibson worked on this case pro-bono, a common act among the network of African American lawyers in the 1930s and 1940s that included William Ming and James Nabrit. In 1940, Gibson became the assistant to William H. Hastie, aide to U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson. In 1941, the Commission of Fair Employment Practice was implemented to fight institutionalized segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces. In response, Gibson worked with individuals like Otto Nelson, Jr., chairman of the Joint Commission on Negro True Policies, to investigate discrimination against African American servicemen. Celebrities like Joe Louis and Jackie Robinson joined the U.S. Army as a result of the "Double V" anti-segregation campaign, as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_004, TRT: 0:31:17 ?

In 1943, Truman K. Gibson became aide to Henry Stimson, U.S. Secretary of War. In 1946, he was appointed to the Advisory Committee on Universal Military Training, where he spoke with President Harry S. Truman about segregation in the U.S. Due to the Advisory Committee's findings, President Truman integrated the U.S. Armed Forces in 1948; Army Chief of Staff Dwight D. Eisenhower was not in favor of this. In 1949, Gibson became director of Joe Louis Enterprises, and involved with the International Boxing Club (IBC). The IBC worked with networks and sponsors to organize televised boxing events in New York City, Chicago, and Detroit, which raked in as much as \$50,000 per fight; fighters received forty percent of this payout. Gibson rose to the position of president in 1959, and faced issues with corrupt labor union leaders and the "mob". The IBC dissolved in 1959 under the threat of a federal anti-trust lawsuit. Gibson talked about Joe Louis' military service, career, and his substance abuse issues, as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_005, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

In 1959, Truman K. Gibson became president of the International Boxing Club (IBC). IBC leaders set a groundbreaking precedent for televised boxing matches, and transformed how fighters were taxed. Though the IBC was not formed with the intention of promoting televised boxing matches, endorsements from wealthy patrons and companies like Gillette were ideal for promoters, fighters, and television networks. In its heyday, the IBC promoted over 100 fights a year in New York City, Chicago, and Detroit. Gibson also managed two training gyms in Chicago; one in Miami; several in New York City; and one farm club in Chicago. Gibson's involvement with the IBC and its corrupt affiliates resulted in a 1959 indictment led by Attorney General Robert Kennedy; Gibson was later convicted of extortion and conspiracy. He co-owned several Chicago businesses where the policy numbers game operated. Gibson talks about the greatest boxers of all time, and Joe Louis' divorce from Marva Trotter and marriage to HistoryMaker Rose Morgan.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_006, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Truman K. Gibson returned to his legal practice after ending his career as a boxing promoter in 1959. Though Gibson occasionally ...some civil rights cases, he focused on business law to make money, representing individuals like Colvin Roberts, brother of HistoryMaker Herman Roberts. Gibson worked with Roberts' construction company to secure contracts for the construction of prefabricated homes in West Africa. Gibson also worked with the Overseas Private Investment Corporation; farm owner Bruce Norris (who had a business partnership with Haitian president Francois Duvalier); and the City of Philadelphia to sell sludge unsuccessfully to the Bahamian government. Gibson's proudest career moment was his receipt of the Medal of Merit Award for Civilians in 1947. Gibson feels that the black community's sense of collective identity was lost due to integration. Gibson talks about his mentor, Illinois State Representative William L. Dawson, and his father, Truman K. Gibson, Sr., founder of Atlanta Mutual insurance company.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_001_007, TRT: 0:24:18 ?

Truman K. Gibson narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_002_008, TRT:

0:28:40 ?

Truman K. Gibson's father, Truman K. Gibson, Sr., attended Clark Atlanta University, where W.E.B. DuBois was his professor. Upon DuBois' recommendation, he was admitted to Harvard University, where he completed his undergraduate studies in 1909. He founded Atlanta Mutual insurance company between 1915 and 1916. The company rose to prominence, and won Gibson, Sr. friends like music executive Harry Pace. As a youth, Gibson, Jr. was not affected by segregation or colorism in Atlanta. He was also encouraged to read by his mother. In 1921, the Gibsons moved to Columbus, Ohio to escape the Atlanta Race Riots. A bright student, Gibson, Jr., enrolled in the predominately white East High School where he started the "Merrymakers Club" to build relationships with his white peers. After learning of racism at Northwestern University, Gibson, Jr. elected to attend the University of Chicago, where he worked for Howard Gosnell, and was classmates with General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., attorney William Ming, and Alberta Starks.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_002_009, TRT: 0:28:05 ?

At the University of Chicago, Truman K. Gibson interviewed Chicago's top African American politicians, and attended political meetings, for Howard Foote Gosnell from 1930 to 1935. Networking with these men led to his first job working as an attorney in the law offices of J. Ernest Wilkins and Bill Haynes. As he developed stronger relationships with Chicago's African American attorneys and businessmen, he was introduced to city corruption, as well as organized crime ventures like the policy numbers game. Gibson met Julian Black, Joe Louis' manager, at a dinner meeting with his mentors, and the two became friends. The duo worked to get Joe Louis enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II after Gibson began working for the U.S. Department of War in 1940. Louis experiences with segregation, coupled with his celebrity, led to the integration of several Army posts during World War II. Gibson also talks about Joe Louis' love of golf, financial difficulties, infidelity issues, and substance abuse issues.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_002_010, TRT: 0:31:19 ?

In 1949, Truman K. Gibson started promoting boxing, and became involved with the International Boxing Club. Gibson describes the first televised east to west fight he and his business partner, Arthur Wirtz, transmitted. Though the mob influenced the boxing industry in the 1950s, their interests were more entrenched in horse racing. Nevertheless, Gibson's connections with sportsmen like James D. Norris, who was closely affiliated with mobsters, led him to be offered sports-related bribes and bribes of a political nature, which he refused. In the 1950s and 1960s, the policy numbers game fueled Chicago's shadow economy. Gibson talks about numbers game kingpins like the Jones Brothers and Ted Rowe. Gibson's friend and mentor, Illinois State Representative William L. Dawson participated in the shadow economy as it related to jitney syndicates. Gibson also talks about legendary police officer Sylvester "Two Gun Pete" Washington, integration's effects on Chicago's black business culture, and the black bourgeoisie.

Video Oral History Interview with Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Section A2002_079_002_011, TRT: 0:12:24 ?

Truman K. Gibson led a healthy life by staying active in health clubs, refraining from smoking, and only drinking socially. In addition, Gibson had three major regrets: getting drunk with composer Jerry Goldsmith; leasing property in the

Caribbean; and turning down ownership of two McDonald's franchises. Gibson closes the tape by talking about his wife, Isabelle, his daughter, Karen, and his grandchildren.