

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alma Arrington Brown

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Brown, Alma Arrington, 1940-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alma Arrington Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 24, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:12:30).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Bank executive Alma Arrington Brown (1940 - 2016) is senior vice president of Chevy Chase Bank. Brown is the widow of the late Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, and after his death founded the Ronald H. Brown Foundation, which established a policy center for domestic and international commercial growth, as well as the Ron Brown Scholars Program. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 24, 2003, in Bethesda, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_238
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Widow of the late Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, Alma Arrington Brown was born in Brooklyn, New York, on February 14, 1940. After high school, she attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she received her B.A., and then later attended Manhattanville College in Purchase, New York, where she earned her master's degree.

Brown and her husband Ron were married after he completed his Army basic training in 1962. In 1963 he was called up to active duty, sent first to Germany and later to South Korea. After he completed his service in 1967, the Browns returned to New York, and in 1973 relocated to Washington, D.C., where Ron headed the offices of the National Urban League. In 1975, Alma began working for the National Black Child Development Institute as a program specialist, and from there she became the program director of the National Council of Negro Women. Brown moved into the public sector in 1984, serving as executive assistant to the acting director of the Office of International Business in Washington, D.C., a post she later assumed.

Brown became involved in broadcasting in 1989 when she took over as director of public affairs and public relations for WKYS-FM. She remained there for six years before joining Chevy Chase Bank as a vice president. Later, when Chevy Chase Bank and Black Entertainment Television joined to form BET Financial Services, she became vice chairperson of the venture. After the bank severed the relationship in 1999, Brown stayed on with Chevy Chase, where she presently serves as senior vice president.

With the death of her husband in a plane crash in 1996, Brown remained strong, and together with her children established the Ronald H. Brown Foundation, which established a policy center for domestic and international commercial growth, as well as the Ron Brown Scholars Program. She was also named to serve as an honorary co-

chairperson of President Bill Clinton's reelection campaign in 1996. She remains active with the National Urban League, the United Negro College Fund and the Girl Scouts of America. The Ford Foundation, the National Council of Negro Women and the National Association of Broadcasters have all honored her for her work. Brown has also been active in keeping the memory of her husband alive, participating in the christening of the U.S.S. Research Vessel Ron Brown and presenting awards in his honor.

Brown passed away on April 3, 2016.

Brown has two children, Tracy and Michael, and two grandchildren. She lives in Maryland.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alma Arrington Brown was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 24, 2003, in Bethesda, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bank executive Alma Arrington Brown (1940 - 2016) is senior vice president of Chevy Chase Bank. Brown is the widow of the late Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, and after his death founded the Ronald H. Brown Foundation, which established a policy center for domestic and international commercial growth, as well as the Ron Brown Scholars Program.

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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:

Brown, Alma Arrington, 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Brown, Alma Arrington, 1940- --Interviews

African American women executives--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews

Banks and banking--Washington (D.C.)

African American families--New York (State)--New York

Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs

Interracial marriage--Southern States--History

Cultural pluralism--New York (State)--New York

Education--New York (State)--New York

Fisk University

Brown, Ronald Harmon, 1941-1996

Middlebury College

Americans--Germany

National Urban League

National Council of Negro Women

Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs

Radio stations--Washington (D.C.)

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

Kennedy, Edward M. (Edward Moore), 1932-2009

Presidents--United States--Election--1988

Elections--United States--Washington (D.C.)

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Clinton, Bill, 1946-

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Presidents--United States--Election--1992

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Democratic National Committee (U.S.)

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Aircraft accidents--Croatia

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United States. Dept. of Commerce--Officials and employees

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Husbands--Death--Psychological aspects

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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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Chevy Chase Bank

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## Occupations:

Bank Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Alma Arrington Brown, September 24, 2003. 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 Alma Arrington Brown, Section A2003\_238\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Raised in Brooklyn, New York, Alma Arrington Brown is the only child of Dorothy Ann and Martin Luther Arrington. One recurring family story describes the marriage of her maternal great-grandparents, a white blacksmith and a black woman in Greenville, South Carolina. Her great-grandfather was subsequently run out of town. Brown's father attended an all black college in West Virginia and her mother attended a mostly white university in New York City. The two then enjoyed a middle class lifestyle with their daughter in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. When her mother, a public school teacher, discovered the overcrowded conditions of the schools, she enrolled Brown in a private high school in downtown Brooklyn. Brown describes the Brooklyn of her youth as an ethnically diverse place. Brown's father died in 1986.

African American women executives--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Banks and banking--Washington (D.C.).

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Interracial marriage--Southern States--History.

Cultural pluralism--New York (State)--New York.

Education--New York (State)--New York.

Fisk University.

Brown, Ronald Harmon, 1941-1996.

Middlebury College.

Americans--Germany.

National Urban League.

National Council of Negro Women.

Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

Radio stations--Washington (D.C.).

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-.

Kennedy, Edward M. (Edward Moore), 1932-2009.

Presidents--United States--Election--1988.

Elections--United States--Washington (D.C.).

Democratic Party (U.S.).

Clinton, Bill, 1946-.

Presidents--United States--Election--1992.

Democratic National Committee (U.S.).

Aircraft accidents--Croatia.

United States. Dept. of Commerce--Officials and employees.

Husbands--Death--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Alma Arrington Brown, Section A2003\_238\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Educated at various New York City schools -- private and public -- Alma Brown describes that she was not involved in extracurricular activities. She followed her father's lead and attended a historically black university. Alma Brown was acquainted with many Fisk University students who would go on to be important historical figures. She describes that though many of them were particularly active in the Civil Rights Movement, she had a more timid personality and preferred to stay behind in a supportive capacity. During a college break, she met Ron Brown, her future husband. At the time he was also a student -- at Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont. The two married upon graduation. Alma Brown describes that they lived in Harlem, New York for a time and eventually moved to Germany for three years, as Ron Brown was stationed there with the United States Army. Alma Brown gave birth to their first child, son, Michael, in a German hospital.

Video Oral History Interview with Alma Arrington Brown, Section A2003\_238\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Alma Brown describes that she and her husband, Ron Brown enjoyed their time in Germany. They were not aware of the extent of the Civil Rights Movement that had developed in the United States. Brown recognized the impact of the Movement when she saw a picture of the March on Washington in a copy of Ebony magazine. The couple decided to move back to the United States in order for Ron Brown to complete law school. Alma Brown took on a teaching job and became pregnant with her second child. She pursued her Master's degree and the couple moved to Washington, D.C., as Ron Brown was offered an executive position with the National Urban League. Alma Brown took on positions with a number of non-profit organizations in Washington, including the National Council of Negro Women and the National Black Child Development Institute. She then began a career in communications, hosting her own weekly public affairs show on a Washington, DC radio station.

Video Oral History Interview with Alma Arrington Brown, Section A2003\_238\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Alma Brown describes that her husband, Ron Brown, became involved in party politics in 1980, working on Senator Edward 'Teddy' Kennedy's campaign. He subsequently worked with Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr. on his presidential campaigns. Following the 1988 presidential election, Ron Brown decided to run for the position of chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He was successfully elected. Ron Brown then met then-Arkansas Governor, William 'Bill' Clinton, prior to his 1992 election to the United States presidency. Clinton later appointed Ron Brown as the United States Secretary of Commerce. Ron Brown was part of a well-respected economics team, those responsible for creating the 1993 tax structure. Alma Brown then discusses the circumstances of Ron Brown's 1996 death in a plane crash while on business in Croatia.

Video Oral History Interview with Alma Arrington Brown, Section A2003\_238\_001\_005, TRT: 0:14:40 ?

Alma Brown discusses the conspiracy theories that surfaced around the death of her husband, United States Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown. Her daughter wrote Ron Brown's biography. Alma Brown concurs with its conclusion: rumors of foul play were started by those of the right wing and do not deserve further attention. Brown then chronicles her career changes. She has spent a longer time at Chevy Chase Bank than she has with any employer in her career. She envisions self-sufficiency to be crucial for the future successes of black people. She describes that more black people need to become entrepreneurs and leave their enterprises as their legacies. She describes her own legacy to be an emphasis on the closeness of family. Her husband's legacy, she describes, is having been a supportive and empathic boss.