

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Frank Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Frank, 1953-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Frank Brown,
Dates:	October 7, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:14:16).
Abstract:	City council member and city government official The Honorable Frank Brown (1953 - 2019) was the executive director of Housing In Omaha, Inc., a nonprofit, affiliate corporation of the Omaha Housing Authority in Omaha, Nebraska. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_283
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Omaha, Nebraska's, District Two City Councilman, Frank Dee Brown was born on August 18, 1953, in Omaha, Nebraska, to Lyda Montgomery and Warren Hugh Brown. Brown grew up around his father's lounge on North Omaha's 24th Street. His family lineage includes black fur trappers, Scotch Irish and Mexican. His uncle, nicknamed "Little Frank" Dee Brown, was a successful businessman and actor. He appeared in the movie, *Bedlam* with Boris Karloff and in the *Wizard of Oz*. Brown's uncle was the first husband of actress/activist Ruby Dee and a friend of Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte. Brown, who enjoyed CYO basketball, attended St. Benedict's Elementary School and graduated from Holy Name High School in 1971. He attended Virginia Union University from 1971 to 1972 and graduated from the University of Omaha in 1975 with a B.A. degree in communications.

Brown's career began as a researcher for Omaha's KAFB-AM Radio's *Walt Kavanaugh Show*, the top rated radio show in the Midwest in 1975. Next, he was an investigative reporter for KMTV-TV and KETV-TV. As a journalist, Brown investigated the Iowa School for the Deaf, a hotel collapse, the John Joubert murder case and the United Airlines' crash in Sioux City, Iowa in 1989. In 1995, Brown became director of the Jimmy Wilson, Jr. Foundation which was named for a fallen police officer. Brown gained a reputation in the community which led to his candidacy as an Omaha city councilman in 1997, when the seated black councilwoman from the second district, Brenda Council, unsuccessfully ran for mayor.

Brown is an advocate for jobs, gun control and better housing. He was an avid supporter of a new sports stadium, library renovation and a new jazz complex on 24th Street. Always a defender of and advocate for the impoverished African North Omaha community, Brown is also the Executive Director of Housing In Omaha, Inc., a nonprofit in Omaha, Nebraska.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Frank Brown was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 7, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member and city government official The Honorable Frank Brown (1953 - 2019) was the executive director of Housing In Omaha, Inc., a nonprofit, affiliate corporation of the Omaha Housing Authority in Omaha, Nebraska.

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:

Brown, Frank, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Frank, 1953- --Interviews

City council members--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Omaha (Neb.)

Omaha (Neb.)

Occupations:

City Council Member

City Government Official

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable Frank Brown, October 7, 2007. 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 The Honorable Frank Brown, Section A2007_283_001_001,
TRT: 0:28:43 ?

The Honorable Frank Brown was born on August 18, 1953 in Omaha, Nebraska to Lyda Montgomery Brown and Warren Brown, II. His maternal great-grandparents were a black fur trapper and Scotch Irish woman, who abandoned their daughter, Brown's grandmother, on a Native American reservation. His maternal grandmother married a man from Clarinda, Iowa, where Brown's mother was born in 1936. Upon completing high school, she moved with her family to Omaha in search of better employment. Brown's father, who had Latino ancestry, was born in 1932 to farmers in Ardmore, Oklahoma. After being injured in a car accident, he moved to Omaha to receive medical treatment. He served in the U.S. military, and later as an engineer at the Glenn L. Martin Bomber Plant in Nebraska. In the 1950s, he and his sister opened the first black-owned bar in Nebraska, Omaha's M&M lounge. Brown's paternal uncle, actor Frank Dee Brown, appeared in films like 'Bedlam,' and was the first husband of Ruby Dee, whom he met in New York City.

City council members--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Frank Brown, Section A2007_283_001_002,
TRT: 0:30:27 ?

The Honorable Frank Brown's parents, Lyda Montgomery Brown and Warren Brown, II, met in the late 1940s in Omaha, Nebraska. They raised four children, of whom Brown was the youngest, in a close-knit community in North Omaha. Brown began his education at the all-black St. Benedict the Moor School in Omaha, and went on to attend the majority-white Holy Name High School. There, he was tracked into lower level classes; and, despite his athletic talent, was not allowed to join the basketball team. Instead, he played in the city basketball league until his senior year, when a new coach was hired at Holy Name High School. After graduation, Brown spent the summer with his paternal uncle, Frank Dee Brown, in Washington, D.C.; and then matriculated to Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. Brown talks about his uncle's career as a film actor during the 1940s and 1950s, as well as his uncle's friendship with well-known African American celebrities like Sidney Poitier.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Frank Brown, Section A2007_283_001_003,
TRT: 0:28:36 ?

The Honorable Frank Brown studied sociology and psychology for two years at Virginia Union University, a historically black, Baptist institution in Richmond, Virginia. After witnessing an increase in gang violence, he transferred to the University of Nebraska-Omaha in Omaha, Nebraska, where he studied broadcasting. He went on to work at Omaha's KFAB Radio from 1975 to 1979; and then joined Omaha's KMTV-TV, where he reported on abuse at schools for the deaf in Iowa and Nebraska. In the late 1980s, Brown became an investigative reporter for Omaha's KETV-TV, where he covered homicides and accidents, and interviewed serial killer John Joubert a few weeks before his execution. He left the broadcasting industry to join the Jimmy Wilson Jr. Foundation, which led to his involvement in Omaha's local politics. In 1997, Brown became the Omaha City Council representative of District 2, after campaigning on a platform of jobs, economic development and affordable housing.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Frank Brown, Section A2007_283_001_004,
TRT: 0:29:04 ?

The Honorable Frank Brown served as the Omaha City Council representative of District 2, one of the poorest areas of Omaha, Nebraska. At this point in the interview, he describes the district's history, including the impact of the North

Omaha Freeway. Built after the race riots of 1966, the highway disrupted Omaha's black business district and displaced many African American residents. During Brown's tenure on the city council, he worked to repair the economic losses caused by the freeway, and sponsored development projects like Love's Jazz and Art Center, The Hope Center for Kids and the renovation of the Omaha Public Library. He often clashed with Omaha Mayor Hal Daub, but was supported by his fellow councilmembers. In the late 1990s, Brown joined the board of the Omaha Housing Authority, and helped develop Housing In Omaha, Inc. (HIO), a nonprofit organization responsible for allocating public housing redevelopment funds. Brown became HIO's executive director in 2006.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Frank Brown, Section A2007_283_001_005, TRT: 0:17:26 ?

The Honorable Frank Brown served on the Omaha City Council as the representative of District 2 from 1997 to the time of the interview. He talks about the social problems in Omaha, Nebraska, including crime and unemployment; as well as his hopes for the African American community. Brown shares his advice to aspiring legislators; and reflects upon his career, legacy and service to the citizens of District 2, whom he considered to be his extended family. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.