

ARCHIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC AND CULTURE

liner notes

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Logan H. Westbrook:
Music Industry
Executive,
Entrepreneur,
Teacher,
Philanthropist

From the Desk of the Director

aaamc mission

The AAAMC is devoted to the collection, preservation, and dissemination of materials for the purpose of research and study of African American music and culture.

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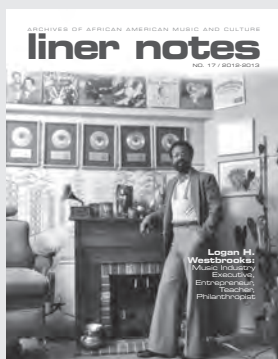
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Logan H. Westbrooks in his Source Records office, ca. 1980.

Since 2010, the AAAMC has been involved in a documentation and oral history project that preserves the legacy of African American pioneers who established and became executives of black music divisions at major record companies, as well as others who have driven the success of independent record companies specializing in black music. This project builds upon research I began in the early 1980s while attending conventions of the Black Music Association, Jack the Rapper, and Black Radio Exclusive, which featured seminars on a range of related topics. These conventions and my interviews with industry pioneers (available as part of the Portia K. Maulsby Collection) made me aware of the role African Americans played in the development of the national/international multimillion dollar music industry. I knew that this unfolding history had to be documented and preserved, otherwise the legacies of these unsung pioneers would be forgotten and remain excluded from histories on the music industry and black and American popular music.

Let's begin the story in the 1960s when Atlantic Records (New York), Motown (Detroit), and Stax (Memphis) dominated the production and sale of black music. Their success in generating sales across racial boundaries did not go unnoticed by the majors. By the early 1970s, CBS, RCA, Warner Bros., Capitol, MGM, and EMI began to expand their reach beyond pop and rock markets to capitalize on the growing cross-cultural consumer base for black music. They established black music divisions, which resulted in an unprecedented number of African American music industry executives (and support staff) and new opportunities for creative artists and entrepreneurs.

During this period called the "Golden Age of Black Music" by industry insiders, small independent black production companies and record labels partnered with the majors, who manufactured and distributed their records through national and international networks. Other entrepreneurs established one-stops

(sub-distributors or wholesalers), while record retail outlets, management and concert promotion agencies, music industry publications, and other related businesses proliferated. African Americans also purchased radio and television stations and expanded local and syndicated programs featuring black music. Operating as a collective, these entrepreneurs, along with their white counterparts, moved black music from the racial margins of society into the mainstream, which contributed to the growth of a multibillion dollar industry. Kenny Gamble, chairman of Philadelphia International Records and co-founder of the Black Music Association, contended: "In 1977, the music industry grossed more than \$3.5 billion. . . . Approximately one-third of that gross was receipts on black music (*Billboard*, September 23, 1978, p. 3).

This issue of *Liner Notes* features excerpts from interviews with executives of black music divisions, which provide insider perspectives of the rise and fall of this golden age, as well as highlights from the Logan H. Westbrooks Collection. Westbrooks will visit the IU, Bloomington campus in early February to help us celebrate Black History Month [see scheduled events inside]. The next issue of *Liner Notes* will feature additional black music industry interviews from our ongoing documentation project.



Portia K. Maulsby

In the Vault: Recent Donations

African American Arts Institute:

The Black Composer Speaks collection consisting of research files, recorded interviews, and transcripts compiled by David N. Baker, Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson for the production of the book by the same title (all rights retained by the AAAI).

Angela Brown Collection:

Additional programs and press clippings from 2011–2012.

Denise Dalphond Collection:

Recorded interviews and transcripts, photographs, press clippings, posters, and research materials related to Detroit techno music.

Gertrude Rivers Robinson Collection:

Original music manuscripts and sketches for works composed by Robinson in addition to correspondence, biographical materials, programs, and press clippings.

Logan H. Westbrooks Collection:

Additional awards and memorabilia, recordings, videos, and clippings documenting Westbrooks's career at CBS and Source Records.

Misha Norton:

The Dale Yarger collection of soul music recordings consisting of 135 albums.

Portia K. Maulsby Collection:

Additional black music industry interviews as well as personal papers and sheet music.

Tom Draper Collection:

Photographs, clippings, and printed materials documenting Draper's career in the music industry.

Vy Higgensen Collection:

Additional programs, clippings, and brochures documenting the activities and productions of the Mama Foundation for the Arts.

CD/DVD/Book/Music Donors:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| IK7 Records | Dialtone Records | Medtone Records | Rounder Records |
| Above SEE Level, LLC | Divine Pocket Bouncers | Mello Music Group | Severn Records |
| Afrasia Productions | DL Media | Merlis For Hire | Shanachie Entertainment |
| Albany Records | Dust-to-Digital | Mr. Wonderful Productions | Shapiro, Liuba |
| Alligator Records | EMI | Moore, Dorothy | Shout! Factory |
| Arts Center of Cannon County | EMI Gospel | Motema Music | SLG Music |
| Audio Preservation Fund | Entertainment One | Music + Art Management, Inc. | Smithsonian Folkways |
| Ballin' Entertainment | Epitaph Records | MVD | SonyWorld Music |
| Bates Meyer, Inc. | Fake Four Inc. | New Video | Sony Music Entertainment |
| BBC Radio 2 | Flipswitch | New World Records | Soundway |
| BBE Music | Forced Exposure | Nelson-Strauss, Brenda | State Library & Archives of Florida |
| Beggars Group | Fort Knox Recordings | Ninja Tune | Stones Throw Records |
| Bellamy Group | Funky Town Grooves | Nonesuch Records | Stony Plain Records |
| Bender/Helper Impact | Girlie Action | Norfleet, Dawn | Sub Pop Records |
| BGO Records | Girton, Rev. Melvin | Northern Blues Music | Taseis Media |
| Big Hassle | GoMedia PR | Now-Again Records | Tattersall, Marnie |
| Blake Ziddel & Associates | Gorgeous Media | Omega | Telarc Records |
| Blind Raccoon | Harmonia Mundi | Omowale, Jonah | Tem Blessed |
| Bloodshot Records | Hieroglyphics Enterprises | Palgrave Macmillian | That's My Worldwide LLC |
| Blues Images | Honorable South LLC | Palmetto Records | Theoretics |
| Brookes Company | Ill Adrenaline Records | Parallel Thought | Thomas, Eddie |
| Capital Entertainment | IU Cook Music Library | Plug Research Music | Tillery, Linda |
| Cherry Red Records | Jacobson Firm | Press Here | TKO Marketing |
| Chev | Kayos Productions | Press Junkie | Trotter, Larry D. |
| Chocolate Industries | Kemado Records | PS Classics | Tyscot Records |
| Clemmons, Rod | Keyes, Cheryl | Quigley Media | Universal Music |
| Cold Tuna Discs | King, Chris Thomas | Quinerly, Reggie | Wellesley College |
| Concord Music Group | Legacy Recordings | Razor & Tie | Ware, Leon |
| Conqueroo | Light in the Attic | RCA Records | Wise, Raymond |
| Cook, David | Mack Avenue | Real Talent Media Group | Woods, Michael |
| Cooper, Tyron | Malaco Records | Redmond, Gus | Worldwide Music |
| Davis, Carl | MaulsBy, Carl | Roche, Tom | XL Recordings |
| Definitive Jux | Maulsby, Portia K. | Rock Paper Scissors | |
| Delmark Records | Mark Pucci Media | Rogers, Diane | |
| Delta Groove Productions | Media Distribution | Round Whirled Records | |

The AAAMC welcomes donations of photographs, film and video, sound recordings, music, and research materials on all aspects of African American music.



Logan Westbrooks with CBS Records black music marketing division staff, 1973.



Logan H. Westbrooks: Music Industry Executive, Entrepreneur, Teacher, Philanthropist

Logan H. Westbrooks is one of the central figures responsible for opening the doors of the music industry to black artists and executives. In addition to his pioneering role as the director of special markets at CBS Records in the 1970s, Westbrooks is known for his work as a teacher, an international business consultant, an author, a real estate entrepreneur, a philanthropist, and a highly sought-after lecturer.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1961 from Lincoln University (Jefferson City, MO), where he served as a leader in the Student Government Association and other campus organizations, he worked for a short time as a merchandising representative for the Johnson Publishing Company (1963–1965). Westbrooks gained his initial introduction to the music industry by working for various divisions of the RCA Victor Distributing Corporation in Des Plaines, IL (1965–1967). He was hired by the Capitol Record Distribution Corporation in 1967 as the company's first black territory salesman for their Chicago market. In this position, Westbrooks was responsible for promoting albums by black, country, and pop artists such as Lou Rawls, Nancy

Wilson, Nat King Cole, The Beatles, Glen Campbell, The Lettermen, Bobby Gentry, and Cannonball Adderley.

In 1968, he was promoted to regional promotion manager for the Midwest. In this new position, Westbrooks was solely responsible for promoting and securing airplay for all of Capitol's black music releases throughout the major urban centers of the region. He was promoted to the position of administrative assistant to the vice president of marketing in 1970, but he soon left to serve as the national (R&B) promotion director for Mercury Records in Chicago where he handled releases for artists such as Jerry Butler, Gene Chandler, Melba Moore, Erroll Garner, Buddy Miles, and Rod Stewart.

Already recognized as a black pioneer in the music industry, Westbrooks was to show his true business savvy following his move to CBS Records in November 1971 as the company's first director of special markets (i.e., their newly created black music division). In his book *The Anatomy of a Record Company: How to Survive in the Record Business* (1981), Westbrooks described his primary responsibility within CBS as the creation of "a black marketing staff to penetrate the black market." By May of

1972, he had marketed a string of number one R&B hits for CBS including “Back Stabbers” by the O’Jays, “If You Don’t Know Me by Now” by Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, and “Me and Mrs. Jones” by Billy Paul. He also served as a liaison between CBS and Harvard during the creation of Harvard’s infamous report, “Study of the Soul Music Environment Prepared for Columbia Record Group” (1972), which was commissioned by Columbia as part of its efforts to capture the black consumer market. Based on this report, Westbrook was able to increase the staff of the special markets division from four to thirteen.

Under Westbrook’s leadership, Columbia grew from having almost no black product in 1971 to being a leader on the black music scene by 1974: a move that included strengthening relations with Philadelphia International Records (corporate home of the songwriting and record production powerhouses, Kenneth Gamble and Leon A. Huff) and the acquisition of distribution deals with Stax, Invictus, and T-Neck Records. Beginning in 1974, Westbrook spearheaded CBS’s efforts to explore potential African markets [see inside story] and was named director of special markets for Columbia Records International as well as managing executive of CBS Africa (Paris, France).

After working for three years to locate potential African artists with stateside appeal and to promote a foothold for Columbia in West Africa, Westbrook left his position at CBS for California where he served as vice president of marketing for the fledgling Soul Train Records (part of Cornelius–Griffey Entertainment). Two years after the label’s collapse in 1978, he began to learn the real estate trade from long-time veteran Joe Bradfield. The late ’70s also marked the beginning of his tenure as a part-time lecturer at California State University teaching a course on the black music industry.

In addition to establishing himself as a real estate entrepreneur and teacher, Westbrook launched Source Records in 1978 through the aid of an MCA New Ventures’ MESBIC grant. With artists such as Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, Sharon Paige, Chuck Brown & The Soul Searchers, Rose Banks (sister of Sly Stone), and Travis Bigg (performer on several Isaac Hayes albums), Source garnered a number of gold records and grossed over \$3.5 million during its first year.

continued on page 8.



Top to bottom: 1) Don Cornelius and Westbrook presenting gold record to Johnny Nash on Soul Train, 1973; 2) Buddy Miles and Westbrook, ca. 1971; 3) Westbrook with Sharon Paige and Harold Melvin at artist signing in Source Records Studio, ca. 1979.

Save the Date!



Logan Westbrook will be visiting the Indiana University–Bloomington campus in early February to help us celebrate the beginning of Black History Month. Follow us on Facebook (<http://tiny.cc/xjqjow>) for updates on these upcoming events:

- Monday, Jan. 21st | Logan H. Westbrook Collection exhibit opens in the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center (NMBCC) Bridgwaters Lounge
- Friday, Feb. 1 | Opening of exhibit on the black music industry at Bloomington City Hall
- Monday, Feb. 4 @ 5:00-6:00pm | Public lecture by Westbrook in the NMBCC Grand Hall

- Tuesday, Feb. 5 @ 6:30–7:30pm | Public lecture by Westbrook at Bloomington City Hall

Sponsors:

Liberal Arts and Management Program; City of Bloomington; Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center; Office of the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Multicultural Affairs; Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies; Department of American Studies; Archives of African American Music and Culture; Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology



KJLH deejay Rick Holmes taping an interview with Westbrooks, Johnny Nash, and Billy Paul.

Images from the Logan H. Westbrooks and AAAMC Black Radio Collections **Now Available Online**

Through the assistance of the Indiana University Digital Library Program (DLP), the AAAMC has uploaded thumbnail images for over 1,200 photographs in the Logan H. Westbrooks and AAAMC Black Radio collections. The AAAMC Black Radio Collection is composed of several smaller photograph collections including the Ed Castleberry, George Nelson, Jack Gibson, Katherine Lewis, Rick Roberts, Skipper Lee Frazier, and Travis Gardner collections. To browse the images and their descriptions, visit IU's Image Collections Online site at: <http://tiny.cc/7gqjow>.

We encourage users who have more information about the people, places, or events pictured in any of the images, or who wish to provide other feedback, to click the "contact the curator" link below the appropriate thumbnail. Users wishing to request access to a larger version of an image for research purposes may also follow this link.

Both Image Collections Online and Archives Online (<http://tiny.cc/diqjow>) continue to grow, so check back regularly for new images and collection finding aids.



Jerry Butler with group at Mercury event, late 1960s.



Ground breaking ceremony at the Church of God in Christ headquarters in Memphis with Bishop Mason holding an ax, ca. 1951.



Eddie Castleberry in WMBM control room, 1956 (Ed Castleberry Collection).



Logan and Geri Westbrooks with Cannonball Adderley, 1970.



Shrine Circus tiger visits KYOK studio, ca. 1964 (George Nelson Collection).

continued from page 5.

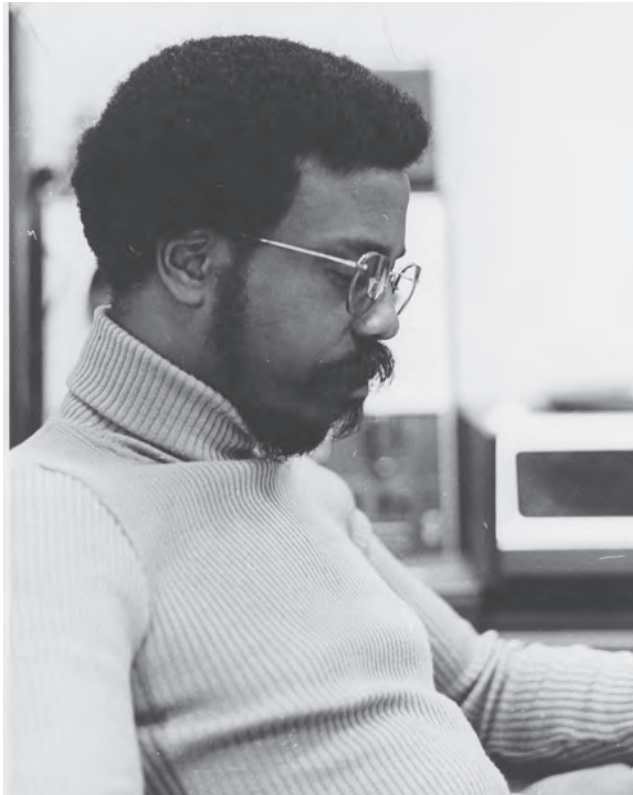
Following the close of Source Records in 1983, Westbrooks shifted his focus to philanthropy by founding the Helping Hands Home for Boys that same year. Westbrooks operated the home along with his wife, Geri, for fifteen years before selling it to Boys Town USA in 1998. During this time, he also owned and operated Westbrooks Management (1994–1996) and served for one year as vice president and general manager of *Black Radio Exclusive* (BRE) magazine beginning in the fall of 1988.

Westbrooks has also served as an important religious leader in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). He earned his Masters in Biblical Counseling from the Eternal Word Graduate School (Los Angeles) in 2000 and currently serves as the pastor for Faith Temple. Following the move of Faith Temple to Azusa, CA, in 2000, Westbrooks acted as the founding member of the Azusa Human Relations Commission. In early 2011, the commission facilitated

the federal indictment of fifty-one people associated with the Azusa 13 gang—an act that is hoped to end fears of gang violence and harassment that have plagued Azusa's black citizens for over a decade.

Throughout his career, Westbrooks has paved the way for the black music industry executives who followed him and has been instrumental in promoting over twenty-five platinum and gold records. He is the recipient of the Outstanding Memphian Award, a distinguished alumnus of Lincoln University, a member of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Hall of Fame, and a former ambassador for the 1997 Annual African Music Festival for Education in Senegal. He has been featured in the 2007 PBS documentary, *Respect Yourself: The Stax Records Story*, and on “Make It Funky,” the eighth episode of the Experience Music Project's PBS series *Rock & Roll*.

The Logan H. Westbrooks Collection:



Due to Dr. Portia K. Maulsby's continuing efforts to document the black music industry, the AAAMC is frequently the first repository researchers turn to when seeking industry-related primary source materials. Now, with the addition of the Logan H. Westbrooks Collection, the Archives will be able to offer researchers a glimpse into the life of one of the first black music executives at a major record label.

Logan H. Westbrooks's papers begin with his formative years, revealed through various personal effects such as report cards

and photographs from the public schools he attended during the 1940s and 1950s in Memphis, Tennessee. Picking up again in 1968, the collection documents Westbrooks's career at the major labels, starting with positions at Capitol and Mercury Records in Chicago and continuing through his 1971–1974 tenure as the first director of special markets at CBS in New York. Correspondence during this period reveals many interesting facets of the marketing and promotion activities of these companies, while organizational charts show the rise of black music divisions. Of particular interest are the wide variety of photographs illustrating Westbrooks's professional activities during this era, ranging from CBS national sales conventions and black music marketing division meetings and receptions, to promotional events with popular deejays and artists, to industry events such as NATRA (National Association of Radio & Television Announcers) conventions and Grammy Award selection committees, to Black Caucus and other political events [see p. 6].

After moving to CBS International in 1974, Westbrooks conducted considerable research in West Africa for the special markets division. His papers detail his efforts to gather information on schools, housing, banking, and customs and business permits essential for future employees and company operations, as well as information on the distribution, sale, and promotion of records in Africa. Particular attention is given to the artist roster and record pricing of EMI in Nigeria, but Westbrooks also investigated the sales potential for Motown and Soul Train Records in Africa. Original copies of the Senegal newspaper *Le Soleil* and a variety of personal photographs document some of his activities during this period, including his first trip to Africa in 1974 with the Jackson 5 [see p. 24].

The corporate archives of Westbrooks's own label, Source Records, constitute the bulk of the collection. Copies of all outgoing correspondence detail the day-to-day business operations, while contracts, royalty statements, financial ledgers, and publicity materials shed light on some of Source Records' biggest hits, including Chuck Brown & the Soul Searchers' "Bustin' Loose" and the Valentine Brothers' "We Belong Together." Other artists



Westbrooks with CBS artists and managers including Granville White, Gerry Griffith, Johnny Williams, and Billy Paul, ©1972 Rod-Tex Pictures.

signed to Source are also featured in the collection, including Sharon Paige, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, Rose Banks, Opus 7, Travis Biggs, and Smash (featuring the DeBarge brothers). Artist publicity photographs, original albums and 45 rpm singles, audiocassettes, rare test pressings, and radio spots recorded on open reel tape add to the documentation of the company.

While in the process of founding Source Records, Westbrooks began teaching a class on “The Anatomy of a Record Company” at California State University. Students were given an opportunity to assist with key decisions for the label, including the selection of the company’s name, and they also encouraged Westbrooks to sign Chuck Brown & the Soul Searchers after listening to the group’s demo tape in class. Westbrooks continued to teach music industry classes at CSU through the early 1980s, which are documented through photographs and course materials. Also included are early drafts of his book, *The Anatomy of a Record Company: How to Survive in the Record Business*, based upon his classroom lectures.

After Source Records closed in 1983, Westbrooks formed a professional management company, Ascent Music Inc. His papers reveal that he managed the group Boyz of Paradize, promoted a tour for Teena Marie, and continued to handle licensing issues for Chuck Brown’s “Bustin’ Loose,” which was sampled in Nelly’s 2002 song “Hot in Herre.” He also remained active in Senegal, serving as ambassador for the Senegal Festival of African Music in the mid-1990s, and corresponding with the president of Senegal, Abdou Diouf.

In addition to shedding light on his many professional pursuits, Westbrooks’s papers reveal a wide range of community and philanthropic activities ranging from benefit concerts for the Martin Luther King, Jr., Foundation and the Goodwill Homes International Friends, to the founding of the Helping Hands Home for Boys in Los Angeles and his work as a religious leader in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the latter of which is also documented through historic photographs of COGIC events.

Additional audiovisual highlights include a wide range of 45s on independent labels (PIR, Invictus, T-Neck, Soul Train, Calla) promoted by Westbrooks, a demo reel for a *Soul Train* radio show, recorded proceedings of the NATRA 12th Annual Convention in 1967 and the first Black Music Association Conference in 1980, a R&B music presentation with voiceover by WBL5 deejay Frankie Crocker from a 1973 CBS national sales meeting, and a 1981 discussion of black record companies on 93 KHJ “Boss Radio.”

Earlier this year, Westbrooks made an additional deposit of artifacts and memorabilia that includes framed gold records for Chuck Brown & the Soul Searchers’ “Bustin’ Loose; medallions awarded to Westbrooks by the NAACP, the Mayor of Memphis, and the National Civil Rights Museum; and a dozen framed plaques and awards from *Billboard*, *Cashbox*, *Jet*, and *BMI*. Sadly, the most recent donation was a funeral program from Chuck Brown’s memorial service; Source Records’ star performer and the “Godfather of Go-Go” died on May 16, 2012, in Washington, DC.

All photos from Logan H. Westbrooks Collection unless stated otherwise.



L to R: Tom Draper, Frank Mancini, Ray Harris, and Beau Ray Fleming at RCA artist signing of Zulema Cusseaux (front), ca. 1973. Photo courtesy of Tom Draper.

Building upon her earlier research in the 1980s on black music divisions [see Liner Notes no. 13, pp. 8–9], Dr. Portia Maultsby (PKM) returned to the field on November 2010 accompanied by Fredara Hadley (FH) to pick up from where she left off. In addition to revisiting previous interviewees to ask about changes to the industry over the past three decades, she has continued to seek out new voices and perspectives.

Featured here are excerpts from her interviews with Tom Draper, Ray Harris, and Virgil Roberts. For those interested in hearing more from these and other artists, executives, and entrepreneurs interviewed as part of Maultsby's research, audiovisual materials and interview transcripts are available at the AAAMC. Please contact our staff for more details.

“Music—black music, pop music, all music—is the province of Black musicians, and it is our responsibility to make sure they enjoy every advantage the marketplace affords.”

—Tom Draper, *Cash Box* (June 15, 1985)

Tom Draper

Tom Draper (TD) was hired as a salesman by RCA in 1970 while still in business school. He worked his way up to promotions in the company's newly established black music division and eventually became vice president of A&R. In 1975, he was hired to do marketing and promotion for Warner Bros. Records. During his tenure there from 1975 to 1987, Warner Bros. Records' black artist roster not only flourished but surpassed those of all the other major labels. In the following excerpts from an interview with Draper on September 18, 2011, the former music executive discusses the highlights and challenges of his career and the issues he faced as an African American working in a predominately white industry.

TD: I had the opportunity to interview with Warner Bros. Records. They had started an R&B division, and they had Earth, Wind & Fire, LaBelle, The Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, Al Jarreau, and a couple of other artists. So it was in 1975 that I went to Warner Bros. Records. . . . There were a couple of people. David Banks was one of them. He was head of the black music division just prior to my taking over. . . . I was not hired for A&R; I was hired for marketing and

promotion. The A&R department at Warner essentially signed nearly all of the artists.

PKM: Did the A&R department include any African Americans?

TD: No, but Bob Krasnow was brought in to sign a lot of the black music artists. [He] worked at King Records years ago, worked with James Brown. When I got to Warner, Al Jarreau had just come out with *We Got By*. The record had sold maybe four or five thousand copies when I arrived. The chairman of the company asked me to really work on Al Jarreau. Given that he didn't really fit into the R&B format, it was not the easiest thing in the world to do. . . . We went from an artist who was selling four or five thousand records to a guy who sold platinum before I left and who has since become an international star.

PKM: In promoting black artists, did you have access to white stations or pop stations?

TD: No, I didn't—just strictly R&B and jazz.

PKM: And were you working it by yourself again?

TD: No, I had a staff of ten or twelve people—might have been more.

PKM: So at Warner the black music division centered around promotion?

TD: Promotion, right. The Staple Singers came in.

PKM: You had Parliament-Funkadelic and one of the George Clinton groups. Didn't Warner also have . . . ?

TD: Yes, Bootsy Collins. But before I got to Warner Bros., Earth, Wind & Fire had gone to Columbia Records. LaBelle had gone to RCA Records. The Watts 103rd kind of just faded. There was not much in the way of a roster.

PKM: What happened? Why did they leave?

TD: I think primarily because Warner was known as a rock and roll company. I think there was some sense of ambivalence about getting so involved in black music, because they had made the effort, but hadn't yet seen much of a return. But once we started showing results, the company became involved to the extent that we brought our entire roster from Los Angeles to New York and essentially did a showcase of all of our artists at the Beacon Theatre . . . to let the industry know that we were really serious about R&B music. We had people like Ashford & Simpson, Candi Staton, and Al Jarreau. It really was the splash that we needed. . . .



Draper with Bootsy Collins at a party. Photo courtesy of Tom Draper.



Ashford & Simpson, ©1989 Timothy White (Karen Shearer Collection)



Zapp, ca. 1990s. Photo by Paul Natkin (Jack Gibson Collection).



Warner Bros. Records executive Carolyn Baker and Draper receiving an award at the 10th Annual NAACP Images Awards, April 1977 (Photo courtesy of Tom Draper).



Rance Allen with Al Bell, CEO of Bellmark Records; Joe Smith, CEO of Capitol-EMI; and Larry Davis, Director Urban Mktg. CEMA Distribution, ca. 1980s (Jack Gibson Collection).



Clive Davis with Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes as they receive their first gold record for the single "If You Don't Know Me by Now," 1972 (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).

PKM: And then after that?

TD: After that, it was a succession of artists. It was Chaka Khan, it was Prince, it was Larry Graham, it was Candi Staton, Al Jarreau, Randy Crawford, and I know I'm leaving out a lot of names.

PKM: I know Warner was building. [At that time], Warner and Columbia were the powerhouses of the major labels producing black music.

TD: Right, exactly. Warner and Columbia had the artists. There was no question about that. We were, I think, probably the two strongest labels when it came to black music.

PKM: So now you are VP, and you stayed in that position for how long?

TD: From '75 until '87.

PKM: So in the course of that time period, what do you consider to be your greatest challenges and your greatest successes?

TD: The greatest challenge was to prove to the industry that we were serious about black music. There was sort of this residual sentiment out there that, "It's a throw away. They're not really serious about it." So that was one of the big challenges that we had to deal with. The second, the successes? Well, Al Jarreau was probably one of the greater successes because we basically started him from nowhere and [raised him] to platinum status. Ashford & Simpson, because they were known primarily as songwriters. I think they recorded with a couple of labels on the East Coast, but it wasn't until they came to us that we were able to get them recognized as real artists. . . .

PKM: So you did convince Warner that they really needed to get behind this effort?

TD: Yes, and they did once those gold records started coming in. And we had the offshoots of the Prince organization: we had Morris Day, who went gold; we had Apollonia 6.

PKM: You clearly had a lot of funk-based artists. Who was doing the signing?

TD: Most of it was Bob Krasnow. He really knew his way around the block. We had Bootsy Collins coming out of the George Clinton operation. We had Roger & Zapp, who we were able to take to gold status on a couple of their records. . . .

PKM: Why did Warner become involved in black music?

TD: Within the Warner structure, there was real impetus on the part of a couple of the senior executives to get us involved in black music. Probably the one who led the charge was Joe Smith, the president of Warner Bros. Records. The chairman, Mo Austin, was kind of on the fence about it because he wasn't seeing the kind of returns that he felt were needed in order to justify that kind of expenditure. But it was Joe Smith who really went to bat and convinced the company that we needed to be in black music.

PKM: Did the riots around '68 or the success of Motown and Stax have anything to do with it? I find it interesting that around that same time all of the major labels were considering starting a black music division.

TD: I think a lot of it had to do with the success of Atlantic Records, which is one of our sister companies. In the Warner group, there were three separate labels: Warner Bros. Records, Atlantic Records, and Elektra Asylum Records. It was Atlantic who controlled the black music industry with their roster of artists. It was because of the success of Ahmet Ertegun, Jerry Wexler, and Arif Mardin that they said, "Wow, there's money here. We need to think seriously about this." Remember Aretha went to Columbia Records and nothing happened. She went to Atlantic Records and just took off.

PKM: And Ray Charles.

TD: And Ray Charles. They had just a huge, huge roster. They had the Spinners, they had—I think they had the whole Philly International group, although that was later.

After briefly discussing competition between RCA and Atlantic Records for artists, Draper offers his perspective on crossing black music over into the mainstream.

PKM: I'm curious as to what kind of cooperation existed between your division of black music promotion and the pop [division] in terms of crossing records over. Was there a relationship, or how did that work?

TD: I worked pretty closely with the head of the pop department. When we felt that we had a record that was ready to cross over, we would sit down and map out a way to get the record started on the pop side. We knew what markets we could go into to get it started until we were able to build it up enough for the rest of the pop radio world to pick it up. There were some records that crossed very easily, like Prince. See, that was a strange period because there was a lot of antagonism within radio about the music. The pop radio market really didn't want to deal with black music. We really had to finesse them a lot in order to get the shot. Black radio became resentful of pop radio

for not picking and moving on records that they had already broken in their individual markets. So there was this tension, this rub, and it persisted for quite some time. Probably, I would say—and I could be wrong on this—but it wasn't until Michael Jackson got that shot at MTV, that things really started opening up, and there was much better and much greater acceptance. But until that time, it was a struggle to get pop radio to deal with black music, because pop radio was angry about the whole disco thing. Disco had really stolen a lot of their thunder. They were in a defensive mode, and black radio was in a defensive mode, and it was just not easy to get these things moved from one side to the other. It was a struggle, but we had some cooperation. There were very few times when things just didn't at least get a shot at pop radio.

PKM: At this time, black music is making headway in general within the mainstream. Is it because of the number of mainstream whites, particularly the youth, listening to black radio? How would you explain [the music] beginning to cross over before radio crossover?

TD: That's a good question because I think that black music artists crossed a lot sooner than pop radio crossed. Again, this is just an anecdotal little thing. I have a neighbor who grew up here, really sort of a Southern blue blood. His fondest memories were of listening to Motown records and seeing those artists come through. But pop radio resisted embracing it. I think it was for defensive reasons. They wanted to be able to say, "We play pop music. We play rock and roll. We're not into disco. We're not into R&B. This is where we are."

PKM: About the mid-'80s, the major labels were signing and robbing the independent black labels—Motown, Stax, etc.—of their top artists. Aretha, Diana Ross, and even Curtis Mayfield are signed to various deals with the major labels. But they were sending the artists in a different direction. How would you describe that period in the industry?

TD: I think they felt that they had to in order to be accepted by the mass market. I think they felt that they had to give them more of a pop-sounding musical structure. I think that's where you see several white producers coming in and producing black acts. They're coming with their frame of reference, and they're trying to impose that frame of reference on that artist who really came from a whole other place. . . . The issue of creative control is key. Some of the artists had it, but many of the artists didn't. They were assigned in-house producers or even outside producers, who in the main really were not organically aware of black music and its roots. They didn't walk those streets. They didn't hang out in those clubs on an ongoing basis. The two people who I would look at as folks who

did the very best that they could to really understand black music were Bob Krasnow and Clive Davis. They really made a conscious effort to understand it and to live it organically. Even in the case of those two, they still tried to create pop-sounding black music because it was their sense that it would be more favorably accepted by those outlets that were needed in order to gain that exposure.

PKM: In terms of pop culture, there is a tendency among consumers and scholars to characterize African American music as American while detaching it from the African and African American continuum of musical creativity. What are your thoughts on this?

TD: When you look at music and the term “pop culture,” in a way it’s very similar to what happened with black music that was being recorded independently [as] race music until the corporations got involved, [at which point] it became rhythm and blues. We took it to another level and called it black music. The idea was to try to maximize its effect in the culture to the extent that it was, again, more powerful to non-black ears. So I think that when you look at what has happened, it’s been really a convergence of a lot of elements that have created this notion of pop culture. . . . You listen to ads that are run by car companies and you’ll hear Etta James and you’ll hear Al Green or whomever. That, again, gets soaked into the whole music sensibility on the part of mainstream America.

Towards the end of the interview, Draper discusses the role of national organizations in supporting black music industry executives.

PKM: What impact do you think black organizations like NATRA, the Black Music Association, and BESLA had on the industry during this period, which someone called the golden age of black music?

TD: NATRA was the National Association of TV and

Radio Announcers. They were the gatekeepers. It was to our advantage to be able to align ourselves with them at their conventions basically to ingratiate ourselves with them. One of the great things about these organizations was that they gave those of us who were African Americans in the industry an opportunity to get together to really deal with issues that we found to be similar on both sides of the fence; for them to understand what we were trying to do and for us to understand what they were dealing with. A lot of those stations were not black-owned, so they were dealing with some of the same issues in terms of their presence in those organizations as we were in terms of our presence in the white corporations we worked for. So I always found it good because it gave us a chance to come together, to say, “Wow, we’re not in this thing alone. There is strength in numbers.” Black radio was probably at its high point during that period from the mid-’60s until the late ’80s. Even though many of them were not black-owned, their revenues just rose as a result of the black music that they were provided with to air on the radio. It brought us together. I always felt that it gave us a chance to interface, to woodshed with one another, to commiserate with one another, to deal with the issues of the day knowing that we’re not alone, knowing that there was a LeBaron [Taylor] I could talk to. There was a Ruben Rodriguez I could talk to, and there was a Henry Allen I could talk to. There was a Joe Smith I could talk to. There was an Al Bell I could talk to.

PKM: And Joe Medlin.

TD: There was a Joe Medlin I could talk to. It really gave us a sense of strength to be able to interact with those folks because we never would have been able to do it individually. That was the beauty of those organizational events. We were all able to come together and just discuss issues that confronted us and talk about strategies to be able to move the business forward.



Draper with Tom Rivers, Logan Westbrooks, and Buzzy Willis while Draper was merchandising manager at RCA, ©1972 Rod-Tex Pictures (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).



Prince with Barney Brown, Rick Roberts, and unidentified Warner Bros. representative at KYOK, 1970s (Rick Roberts Collection).

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BLACK RADIO

Exclusive



**Ray
Harris**

**Dick
Griffey**

Black On Black

Ray Harris

Ray Harris (RH) had a long tenure in the music industry from the mid-'70s to the late '90s working as an executive of black music divisions at several major labels including RCA, Warner Bros., and Epic, and as president of the independently owned SOLAR Records. While working in advertising, he segued into music promotions and made his way to the top as vice president of black music at RCA. Between the years 1990 and 1994, he was voted Impact Music Publication's Record Executive of the Year for five consecutive years. In the following excerpts from an interview with Harris on November 16, 2011, he discusses his career and his efforts to expand the presence of African American artists and businesspeople in the music industry.

PKM: What circumstances led you to the music industry?

RH: I started in advertising in 1970 as an estimator biller and worked my way up to an accounting executive. One of the accounts I had as a senior accounting executive that really made my transition into music a lot easier was Dark and Lovely hair products for women and Gold Magic shaving cream for men. At Advertising Contractors, we were more like a bartering agency. The radio stations would give us spots, and we would give them whatever inventory they could use. I got to know black radio because I had to call on a lot of these black radio stations across the country. So anyway, at RCA Records, a position came open for a product manager for R&B music.

PKM: What year was that?

RH: I started at RCA on April 15, 1974. They said they were looking for somebody to be a product manager, but they wanted somebody outside of music, somebody to come in with some different ideas. And here comes this senior account executive guy from Madison Avenue, so I guess I looked like a great fit for them. I didn't think so at the time because I was like, "I don't know about the record business, but I'm going to take this shot." Tom Draper was the senior black person at RCA at the time. He was VP of A&R. At that time, it was Tom Draper, Carl MaultsBy, a guy named Marty Mack, and myself. Marty Mack was the national promotion manager, Carl was the A&R guy, and that was the extent of the national staff of RCA Records for black folks. [There were] about five of us, which was kind of slim for a major company.

PKM: Did they have many black artists?

RH: Yeah. When I got there, they had Jon Lucien, a jazz ballad guy; Nina Simone; Main Ingredient; New Birth; Friends of Distinction; the lady from London, Cleo Laine; and Zulema. They were slowly building. I think RCA was one of the last majors who really came on board.

I started as a product manager. Marty Mack left the company, and they started interviewing various guys to replace him. At that time, RCA wasn't really known in black music. They were kind of a Johnny-come-lately. You had Tom [Draper] over there in black music at Warner Bros. You had CBS, Columbia, with Stax and Philadelphia International. RCA didn't have that kind of commitment. So anyway, they were interviewing guys, and they couldn't find the guy they really wanted to put into a national position even [among] the guys who were in need of a promotion. We had four guys, and they all vied for Marty's spot. So for some reason they said, "Hey, why don't you take it?" I said, "I've never done promotion, and I've never been inside a radio station in my life." They said, "Well, take a shot. We think you can do it." So I took the shot. This was in '75 or '76.

PKM: This was when you had moved from product manager to national promotion?

RH: I was national promotion manager. . . . Things were going okay, but the one thing I noticed was that RCA was not set up to be a force in black music as a company. When I looked at CBS and Epic, they

probably had three or four times the promotional people I had. They had their own black publicists. They had their own black A&R people. They had merchandisers, guys who really pay attention by going into the stores. Most of the sales people [at RCA] were white, and they did not spend a lot of time going into black communities and stopping by the mom and pop shops. Tom [at Warner Bros.] was the first one to have merchandisers going into the stores, paying attention to the black retailers.

PKM: So this was about the late '70s when you were director of promotion?

RH: Yeah. At this point it was R&B promotion and R&B merchandising, and I changed my title to black music marketing and black music promotion. There were a lot of companies at this time that were still R&B. As far as departments were concerned, it was the R&B department they related to. At Sony/CBS they were special markets. So I would dare say I was the first guy to call it the black music department. I'll say I did that. And we were having all of these successes with all of these artists. We had Diana Ross, she came to the label; we were having success with her with "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall," "Upside Down;" we had successes with Odyssey's "Native New Yorker." SOLAR Records was blowing up with Shalamar, Whispers, and Lakeside. All that was going out the door, . . . bananas! I mentioned 20th Century: We had Stephanie Mills, Leon Haywood, Carl Carlton [with] "Bad Mama Jama." You remember that stuff? Salsoul and Instant Funk, you know? Skyy . . . everything was on cylinders and rolling.

They promoted me again to division vice president in an autonomous black music department. I could do what I wanted to do with the budgets. That's when A&R came under my wing, and we were having successes with that. Then Dick Griffey offered me a position at SOLAR Records as president. When I went over to SOLAR, this was the cover [of *Black Radio Exclusive*]: "Black on Black."

PKM: What happened after you left RCA?

RH: There were a lot of executives that came in after me . . . I was fortunate enough in doing whatever I did at RCA that [it became] kind of a premier position and [I was able] to bring RCA to where it was at. It was a number one black record company for a period during that time, and it had never had that reputation before, and it has never had that reputation after.



Clockwise from upper left: 1) Carl Carlton (Rick Roberts Collection); 2) Shalamar. Photo by Randee St. Nicholas (Karen Shearer Collection); 3) Nina Simone (AAAMC General Photo Collection); 4) The Main Ingredient (AAAMC General Photo Collection).

A lot of people wonder why I [left RCA to] go with Dick to SOLAR when I had just received an autonomous promotion—one of the first in the business for a black guy. Why would I leave a major corporation to go with this black company? I was always about black empowerment all of my life. Coming out of Harlem, I've always been about that. One of the axioms I've always said during my career, "Each One, Teach One," I stole from a basketball tournament in Harlem. I took that philosophy when I came into the business—the teamwork of black folks working together. Remember, this was still in the '60s and '70s. We still had our afros; we were feeling really black. So I personally felt that we could take SOLAR to another level that no other company in black music had ever had before—even Motown. That was my thought process. I liked being black, and I liked working black. I liked being around black people. I liked not having to report to white people. I liked that: building black companies, black business, and black people.

Unfortunately, it didn't work out for us. I think we both had good intentions, but what I was told was going to happen didn't happen when I got there. I used to tell my son, "You can't have two lions sleeping in the same den. It just doesn't work." And that's the one time I should have listened to my own advice. So I left SOLAR in '85, and I started my consultant company.

PKM: What was the name?

RH: Harr-Ray Entertainment. And I started consulting for Avant Garde Entertainment, as well. In '88, I went to a meeting representing Morris Day and met with Ernie Singleton, who was the senior vice president of marketing at Warner Bros. at the time. He said, "What do you think about coming back inside?" I said, "Coming back inside to do what?" He said, "To be a promotion guy. I want you to be my VP of promotion."

PKM: What was his position?

RH: He was senior VP of marketing for black music, and I went in as VP of promotion. Ernie left to go back to MCA, and they upped me to senior VP of black music marketing.

PKM: How long were you there?

RH: I left Warner in '96 and went to Epic.

PKM: At Epic, what was your position?

RH: Senior VP of black music. I was there for a year.

PKM: Then after leaving there . . . ?

RH: I did a lot of consulting from '97 pretty much up to 2006. The business was changing so much in this period. It seemed to me that pop music had stopped being the dominant sale music. Leading out of the mid-'90s into the early 2000s, R&B and rap were holding up a lot of companies, but [pop] music sales were on the decline. In my estimation, a lot of these white record company executives were kind of feeling a little threatened by the power of black music executives and black music, so all of a sudden you see black music divisions folding.

I think, also, there was some disconnect between the young guys coming into the business of rap music and their communication with black music executives. That didn't help black music executives at all, because as rap music became more dominant in sales, a lot of black music executives started to be called dinosaurs. They weren't hip enough for the music.

Being an executive of a company, you know that you represent black music and you have a responsibility to this music, but you also have responsibility to your company. So here come the rap guys, and a lot of them felt like they wanted to have a multimillion dollar video—ain't never had a record out in their life. They wanted to have big parties to debut their artists, and they wanted to go on the road with their posse. We had been given a budget that we were responsible for . . . so I'm not sending fifteen guys on the road with you when only five of you are rapping. So there was a disconnect, and I think it gave the white corporate executives the opportunity to take back their record companies because . . . that's when they dismantled all of these black music departments.

PKM: And that began around the mid-'90s?

RH: Yeah, and then it became more pronounced. When these rappers came into the game, their business model *was* different. They wanted to own their company, and they fought for their label. "I want to own my stuff." And they did, and you have to give them credit for that, but at that time it kind of eliminated the black music executives.

PKM: Given your positions in these various record labels, were there specific kinds of challenges that stood out?

RH: It was a challenge to a lot of the white guys, my counterparts, who didn't want me to succeed. They never had to have a black guy telling them what to do before. They didn't want me in. . . . I remember a lot of racism, I remember a lot of jockeying from guys I reported to that I no longer had to report to, so there's a little intimidation by that. And again, I wore my blackness pretty well, so they didn't like that either. I've always been supportive of black movements, like NATRA and BESLA.



Chicago deejays and radio station personnel, including Lucky Cordell, Merri Dee, E. Rodney Jones, and Nancy Wilson, late 1960s (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).

PKM: Could we talk about the other impact of these movements?

RH: When I was talking about me being black in the record business, I would give a lot of credit to black radio and black programmers during this whole Civil Rights era who had a consciousness, because you're always standing on somebody's shoulders. I remember in the early '70s when program directors started telling record companies, "Don't bring any more white boys in here promoting your records. This is a black radio station. Start hiring some black people to represent your product." That's how a lot of black folks got jobs in promotion. The radio stations knew which companies were hiring black folks and which ones weren't, and they would send messages very clearly to companies that weren't hiring black folks because they just wouldn't play their product.

PKM: So what happened to these black-owned stations?

RH: What happened was Bill Clinton in 1996 deregulated radio. At one point you could only own one or two stations in a given market, but when they deregulated it corporations with big money could own four or five stations in a given market. They came in, scooped up all these stations. Some of them were black radio stations. Independent radio stations owners were trying to hold on to their market, but these guys would come in, buy a competing station, change the format to black, and drive those black ownership stations out of business.

FH: That had a huge impact.

RH: Huge. Monumental.

PKM: Who do you credit with the establishment of black music divisions?

RH: Going through the '60s, you had the success of Motown Records, which is not just a black-owned company but an internationally known and renowned company selling records not only to black people but to people all over the world, so of course companies are going to take a look at that. If you're RCA or Columbia and you're seeing success with that, and then you see Stax Records with the success they're having, there's something going on there. . . . We are in black music, but we are not in black music the way we need to be. So we make a deal with Stax, and we make a deal with Philly International. The major labels are saying, "We really need to gear up and put some money into this music so that this can be a profit center for our company," because it's all about profit. But if black radio wasn't breaking these artists, it wouldn't have happened. There has to be some kind of talent. The talent that Motown had certainly played a major part of it. . . . Stax records did it with the artist roster they had. Philly International did it with the artist roster they had. So RCA, Polygram, Warner Bros., all said, "We've got some of these artists, but we really need to gear up and put some more black folks on board."



Virgil Roberts

Virgil Roberts (VR) is an attorney who has worked in the entertainment industry for decades. In 1981, he joined the staff at SOLAR Records, one of the most successful African American-owned record companies in the '80s, as the executive vice president and general counsel. In 1990, he was promoted and served as the president of SOLAR until 1996, at which time he left to start his own law firm, Bobbitt & Roberts. Still a practicing attorney, Roberts specializes in representing entertainment industry clients including such music celebrities as Usher, Kanye West and Chaka Khan.

In the following excerpts from an interview with Roberts on July 20, 2011, he recalls the “golden age” of independent black music labels and the role of African American entrepreneurs in the music industry.

VR: The golden age of black music in America, in terms of record companies and entrepreneurs, [started in 1960]. . . . Generally speaking, depending on how old you are, you remember Motown. People don't

remember Vee-Jay and some of the gospel companies that were precursors to Motown, but they were part of what I think was the golden age for African American entrepreneurs.

PKM: Which would include Duke-Peacock and Don Robey?

VR: Right, so that's where I would start from. I wouldn't start in the '70s because by then Motown was even past its golden era. Motown really dominated in the '60s, and then by the '70s, that's when Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, and Philly International really dominated [the black music industry]. You also had in that same period of time Clarence Avant at Sussex Records. Then later on . . . Total Experience, Taboo, and SOLAR all here in Los Angeles. You also had Stax. And all of the people who headed those companies were entrepreneurs, so it was a real golden age of black music. And it wasn't just black music; it was a golden age for independent music. . . .

There were economic factors that affected the growth and development of the music industry. Going into

the '60s, you did not have major record distributors. You had a number of independent distribution companies that just covered regional areas, and that was the reason you could have regional record companies that would be successful. They might be successful just in the South or just in the Northeast or just in the Midwest. . . . Then the multinational conglomerates begin to focus on becoming fully integrated companies and building systems where they did manufacturing, distribution, etc., and they were more efficient than companies which were not fully integrated. The conglomerates didn't just kill off or buy out black record companies, they bought all record companies. So you look today at a company like Universal Music, well, they own Def Jam and Motown and Mercury and A&M and a whole series of companies that used to be independent companies that all were acquired by conglomerates. . . . So the ability to have product in the store the next day and to fulfill [orders] became a competitive advantage for Warner and then Capitol, EMI, and the other major distributors. That allowed them to be more economically efficient than the independent labels, and slowly but surely they bought [them] up or put [them] out of business. So there was a dynamic that brought [the golden age] to an end, and there also was a dynamic that brought it into existence. And what brought it into existence was this tremendous demand for music that was brought about by baby boomers. . . and it was met by entrepreneurs who went out and signed acts and began to make music for that bulge in the population, because there was an unmet need. So beginning in the late '50s and '60s, there were all kinds of entrepreneurs . . . and they were able to capitalize on a growing demand for music.

One of the reasons that you saw more African Americans starting record companies is because, going back to the '60s, it was fairly low cost; [there were] no barriers to enter into the marketplace. It didn't cost much to make a record. There were literally thousands of independent radio stations. You didn't have Clear Channel; you didn't have the same kind of consolidation. . . . There was a time when you could go from one town to the next and hear totally different music. You didn't have national programmers, so the music that might be played in Oakland would be totally different from music played in Los Angeles. That gave an opportunity to regional companies to create regional music. Even in DC, you still had go-go music that was only played in DC. The difference, going back fifty years ago, is there would be a radio station in a given area and a program director. If you had a relationship with him, you would get your music played, and so you could sell records locally that maybe would never make the national scene. So it was the right kind of environment for entrepreneurs because there was a huge amount of demand . . . and



LeBaron Taylor speaking at the 1975 NATRA convention (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).

then as now there was more talent than there were opportunities. . . .

Roberts goes on to talk about the formation of black music divisions at the major labels and about how racial politics within the industry limited the careers of African American executives.

VR: People didn't really think there was a market for black music, and that really allowed Motown to grow without competition because none of the majors were prepared to invest in talent. But after the success of Berry Gordy, the major companies started black music divisions to try and recreate the success of Motown. So Columbia Records started a black music division. . . . I don't know if you had a chance to interview LeBaron Taylor before he passed.

PKM: Yes, I did—he and Logan Westbrooks, who was [at CBS] before LeBaron.

VR: Right. So LeBaron really was very successful in the black music division; they distributed Philly International. It became so successful that it was the most profitable division that [CBS] had in the music company, and they closed it down.

PKM: Why did they do that if they were so successful?

VR: Because the way companies were organized, your bonuses and your budgets were based upon the dollars that you generated. And because he was generating more dollars than everybody else, he was therefore entitled to get paid more, and his people were entitled to get paid more. This was the '70s, and one of the things that is so hard for people to think about when they go back in history, [is that] America was still



Don Cornelius, Dick Griffey, and Logan Westbrooks of Soul Train Records, 1976 (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).

a very racist place. In the '70s, you still had a lot of segregated eating clubs and country clubs and other things. I just think it was pure racism because he was making more than, let's say, the pop department. They said, "You know what? Music is just music, so let's close down this black division." And what that allowed them to do was divide up the money that was being made [by the black division] amongst the pop department. That's really the reason, because not long thereafter they kicked LeBaron upstairs and put him in government relations, and they reopened their black music division under Vernon Slaughter. . . .

PKM: What happened then in terms of levels of success?

VR: Well, they continued to have success, not the same though. Kenny [Gamble] and Leon [Huff] left, but ultimately [CBS] continued to have success with that division. . . .

PKM: What led to the dismantling of the black music divisions, and when did that happen with the major labels?

VR: You still have black music divisions. They have not been dismantled; they call them "urban." There's always a synonym for people of color. We're colored or Negro or Black or African American. You go from black music divisions to urban. When people talk

about urban music, they really mean black music. They still exist. It's just that they only really have two major distributors. The market place has changed so dramatically.

Later in the interview, Roberts compares the independent rap labels of the '80s and '90s to labels like Motown and Stax for their ingenuity and success working outside of the major labels.

PKM: Where are we now? What are the major events that have occurred?

VR: [One major] development in the record business that really changed things was rap music, which gave a new breath of life to independent companies [in the] late '80s and early '90s. To me, Death Row as a company is probably the most successful of all the rap labels in terms of the ability to break artists and break new ground. Snoop Dogg, NWA, Ice Cube, and Dr. Dre all came out of that same movement. And that emerged almost like the independent companies from the '60s, because the majors would not distribute rap music.

You may remember Ice-T did a [song] called "Cop Killer." There was a highway patrolman who was killed in Texas, and the "Cop Killer" record was in the tape deck of the guy who did the shooting, so for a moment all of the companies ran away from distributing rap music.

But when rap music started, that was a breath of life in another direction for the record business. It changed things. It changed the way that music got marketed. Before rap labels came around, there weren't street teams. Street teams are the ones that go snipe posters, and they'd play music in the park. The reason was that you couldn't get the music on the radio and you couldn't get videos on BET or MTV, so the only alternative was to take the music directly to the people. You'd have people ride around with boomboxes in the back of their cars blasting music, selling music at swap meets, and stuff, because in the early days Walmart would not stock rap music. A lot of stores wouldn't stock it, and so there was a whole alternative marketing promotion industry that grew up around rap music, and it became another point of entry for black entrepreneurs and labels like Cash Money. That's really kind of how Def Jam got started and Death Row Records got started and Master P's label got started. There was a whole series of independent black entrepreneurs who got started in the '90s. It was very similar to what happened in the '60s. The major companies ignored rap, and that created opportunities for new entrepreneurs. . . .

PKM: [Can you] take us back to the founding of SOLAR Records and [explain] how it's situated within the framework of the history of the industry?

VR: SOLAR Records was really founded in 1975, and it was an interesting concept. The original name was Soul Train Records. Don Cornelius had moved his show, *Soul Train*, from Chicago to L.A. Dick Griffey was the biggest black concert promoter. He had taken Stevie Wonder out on a worldwide concert tour in 1974 when Stevie had *The Songs in the Key of Life* album, and that really made Dick the dean of black concert promoters. Don had been having difficulty getting talent to come on his show, and he was competing with Dick Clark. So because Griffey was a concert promoter, he said, "Well, I'll be like the talent coordinator, and I can get the acts I'm taking on tour to be on *Soul Train* as part of promoting the tours." So he started working with Don, and then they came up with an idea: "Hey, we could start a record company, and even if we couldn't get our records played on the radio, we can play them on *Soul Train* so our audience will know about the record." So they started a record company, and the first hit record they had was a medley of Motown songs called *Uptown Festival* that they played on *Soul Train*. [When] it became a hit, they had to put together a group because there was a demand to see the group that was behind the record. That group was originally called The Soul Train Gang and ultimately became Shalamar. Dick and Don had a falling out as partners, and in 1977 Dick changed the name of the company to Sound of Los Angeles Records—SOLAR Records. As they say, the rest sort of became history.

PKM: What led to the closing of SOLAR?

VR: Two things. One, Dick never got to the point where he really wanted to sell the label. Probably more importantly he became really interested in Africa. He actually moved to Africa. . . . He was the guy who was the creative person behind that company, and when he lost interest in the music business, that really affected where we were as a company. I left the company, and other people left the company, and it just sort of wound down in '96 or '97.

PKM: Were you with SOLAR from the beginning?

VR: No. I joined SOLAR in 1981 or '82. SOLAR actually started after Dick and Don broke up in '77, so it was about four years after it got going. I joined right at a point in time when they started to have a lot of success.

PKM: Were you negotiating? What was your role as an attorney?

VR: I did all of our agreements in all areas and really helped run the company. Ultimately, over a period of time, I became president of the company. But as I said, we had two publishing companies. We had a personal management company. We did concert tours. And then a few years after I was there, we did a lot of stuff overseas. We started a SOLAR Records Nigeria. . . . We had the first anti-apartheid telethon here on BET back in the days when the ANC was still considered to be a terrorist group. And so we did a lot of things supporting liberation movements. We bought computers and sent political consultants to Namibia. Griffey was probably, I think after Randall Robertson, the second American to speak at the OAU. So we did a lot of things outside of the United States and I did all of our contracts.

PKM: In Nigeria were you recording Nigerian artists or were you distributing American artists?

VR: Both. We could not take our money out of Nigeria because they had restrictions on allowing hard currency to leave. So the money that we generated through the sale of SOLAR Records in Nigeria was used to create a company in Nigeria to: 1) distribute product and 2) to try and find Nigerian artists. But you cannot do business in Africa long distance. You can't do this. You've got to be there and supervise it. So that's one of the reasons that Dick ended up going to Africa, and that's one of the things he really wanted to do. [Most of the last 10 years of Dick Griffey's life were spent in Africa; he died in 2010 in Los Angeles].



Westbrooks presenting award to Senegalese president, Abdou Diouf, late 1980s (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection)

Interview with Logan H. Westbrooks on CBS International in Africa

On Monday, July 18, 2011, Fredara Hadley (FH) and Dr. Portia Maulsby (PKM) interviewed AAAMC board member, Logan Westbrooks (LW), in his office in Los Angeles [see biography]. The interview spans Westbrooks's rich career at Mercury, Capitol, CBS, Soul Train, and Source Records. Towards the middle of the interview, Westbrooks discusses his role in analyzing and opening markets for CBS International in West Africa. The following excerpt details his activities in Nigeria and Senegal beginning in the latter part of 1973 including his first trip to Senegal as part of the Jackson 5's entourage in 1974.

PKM: Can you discuss the CBS presence in Nigeria? Why were you there in the first place? What brought you in contact with the African industry and African musicians?

LW: Well, CBS did not have a presence in Nigeria. There were some things that were distributed through EMI in Nigeria, and there also was a company out of South Africa—I think it was called Gallo Records—they distributed CBS's products in Nigeria. The idea was to establish [CBS's] own manufacturing facility in Nigeria, to record the local artists, and to bring those artists to the United States, as well as to exploit American music

in the Nigerian market and to actually manufacture the product there in Nigeria.

FH: So there were three purposes for the CBS presence in Nigeria?

LW: Right. There were maybe four or five different officials from CBS International from other parts of the world that had met me there, as well. We were studying the laws of Nigeria. How can we bring manufacturing goods into Nigeria? How can we build a factory there? Basically, it was a feasibility study.

FH: And was Nigeria selected because it's an English-speaking country with the largest population?

LW: At the beginning, I took a look at all of Black Africa. I started in East Africa in Kenya, and I worked myself from Kenya on through Central Africa, Zaire, and then on into Nigeria. I also picked up Ghana and the Ivory Coast. And those were the largest populated countries in Black Africa at that particular time. Then I narrowed it down to Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria. These were English-



Nigerian filmmaker Francis Olatunde working with Jimmy Cliff on the CBS African project, ca. 1974 (Logan H. Westbrooks Collection).

speaking nations, and we decided it would be much easier not only to do business in an English-speaking nation, but also it'd be much easier for us as Americans to blend and fit in. . . . Then of those three countries, Nigeria was the most populated. I think at that particular time, they had about 80 million people, which was many more than Ghana and Kenya.

FH: So when you got there, what was the state of the record industry in Nigeria? Aside from EMI's presence, how were people handling local artists? Were they recording and selling the records of local artists?

LW: Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, Fela was one of the biggest artists in Nigeria at that particular time, and ironically there were a number of Jamaican artists that were big in Nigeria. Jimmy Cliff, for one. Bob Marley was big in Nigeria. There also were a number of very popular black American artists that were selling a lot of records there, like Isaac Hayes. A lot of Stax stuff was being sold in Nigeria at that particular time. A lot of it. They were very popular because of the imports, which [were brought] in through Gallo out of South Africa, and because of [recordings] that had been brought into the country and were being counterfeited. That was big also.

FH: So people made illegal copies way back then?

LW: They sure did. They most certainly did. If I'm not mistaken, I think that was one of the reasons why Dick Griffey decided to move to Ghana. So much of his product was being counterfeited there he just moved there and started doing it himself.

FH: Yesterday, you were telling me about the corporate cultural differences between working in CBS domestic versus CBS international in terms of the people within CBS. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that.

LW: Sure. When I was working at CBS in New York on a national basis, it was CBS domestic. Consequently, I was also working with other top executives of CBS on a national basis, and most of the people that occupied those offices at CBS in New York headquarters were people that had come up through the ranks. They were some of the top sales people in the field, and they had worked themselves up. Most of them were rednecks. And even though they were working in headquarters as top executives, they still were rednecks. And being from the South, I could very, very easily identify those rednecks. There was no question about that. Being the top black executive at this major corporation, there was a lot of socializing that we did, and my wife was always with me. She was much more perceptive than I was. There



L to R: Jermaine Jackson, Geri Westbrooks, Michael Jackson, Ronnie Claypool, Frankie Crocker, Randy Jackson, unidentified Motown employee. Senegal, ca. Jan. 1974 (Logan H. Westbrooks).

were always a lot of things that she caught that either I overlooked or I just didn't pay any attention to, but that racism was there. Then, when I switched over to the international division, it was like night and day. I found that the individuals, the executives, in the international division were much more educated. They all seemed to have their master's degrees. They spoke several languages. They were world travelers, because they worked in the international division. So now it's a completely different situation. These are the people that I'm rubbing shoulders with now. Again, it was like night and day.

Westbrooks goes on to describe how he became a part of the Jackson 5's entourage on their first trip to Africa.

PKM: So working with the promoter to bring the Jacksons to Senegal was the beginning of your involvement in Black Africa's music culture?

LW: Right. [Mamadou] Johnny Sekka was not only a promoter but an international businessman who I had befriended in New York. And it was a relatively simple situation. Here [I am], this black man in what was called the "Black Rock," which is a CBS building, and I maintained an open door. In the past, even a lot of young producers and writers couldn't get in the door, couldn't get past the guards at CBS. Now all of

a sudden, here is a black man, top executive, and his door's always open. And Johnny Sekka was one of the people that found his way to me. I also lived right there in Midtown Manhattan, so a lot of the time we'd meet and socialize there at my office, and then we would go to my apartment, which was about ten minutes away from where I was working. And that was the climate. So he and I, we became friends. Then he told me, which I didn't believe at first, that he was a good friend of the Jackson family and that he was going to take the Jackson 5 to his country and "Would you like to go?" "Of course, I'd like to go. I've never been to Africa." "Well, you and your wife can go." "Okay, fine." Again, I didn't believe him. Then one day, he came into the office. He had all of the passports of the Jackson family, and he was putting the passports and visas and things together. I still didn't want to believe it, but then, there it was. There were quite a few press people that he had assembled to go along, also.

I went to Walter Yetnikoff, who was the president of CBS International, and I said, "I'm going to Senegal on a trip with the Jackson 5. Does CBS International have anything going on in Africa?" He said, "No, why don't you check it out while you're there?" I said, "Okay." So when I went, I made a complete report, checked out the music scene there in Senegal, went in and out of some of the record shops, met with some of the promoters there.

When I went back to New York, I gave him the report. Then he said, "Why don't you join our international division?" "Sure!" That's the way it happened. [This offer] also came along at a time where I had become a little bit restless at CBS domestic, because I had started moving away from the day-to-day activities of pushing and promoting records. I had brought in a guy named Richard Mack, who we had hired away from Atlantic Records, and he became a top guy. I also had an excellent assistant in Marnie Tattersall. So we really, really had it going on, and I was looking around for other things, other areas in the company, even if it meant CBS corporate. So this really came at an opportune time. I immediately transferred over. That was the beginning of another world.

FH: So now you see the passports on the table. The dates are locked in. You've talked to the president of CBS International. You are all headed to Senegal. So what is the deal for the Jacksons? How many concerts are they doing, or what's their responsibility?

LW: As I remember, I think they did one major concert for the everyday people in Dakar. Then we did another concert more for the dignitaries at a much smaller location. So they really did two concerts there. Of course there were about two or three different receptions put on by the president of Senegal, who was Léopold Senghor at the time. He was president then, and also a good friend of Johnny Sekka. . . .

FH: Do you remember anything about [the Jackson 5's] impressions of Senegal?

LW: They loved it—their father in particular because the man, the head of the household, is looked up to with such great esteem. Senegal is a Muslim nation, even though the president and Minister Diouf were Catholic, and a man, that male, is just tops. So the Jackson 5 were great. Michael Jackson was cute and talented and everything, but the key person was Joe Jackson, that father. That's the way it was there. So certainly, he loved it, because all of the attention was focused on the father.

FH: And what was your impression? Was this your first time in Black Africa?

LW: Yes it was. I loved it. Going on a trip like that, even as a part of the entourage, it's a really great feeling. I can remember we arrived together, because we flew from New York to Senegal on the same plane. When we arrived, the red carpet, the band, the dancers, and everything, we were all a part of that. It was for the Jackson 5, but we were there.

FH: This was 1974, so the Jackson 5 were still with Motown.

LW: Yes, they were. But ironically talk was going on at the same time with Joe Jackson and CBS, because Joe Jackson

was in the process of trying to take the Jackson 5 over to CBS. And when they got back to the United States, they went ahead and completed that deal.

FH: What was the impression on the American side, specifically among black industry people, about the Jacksons going to Senegal? Were people excited? Did they think it was a positive thing?

LW: Well, they were excited. They thought it was a very, very positive thing. And very cleverly, a lot of the people that Johnny Sekka had included were press people. *Jet* magazine, for instance, sent a photographer on that trip. There were a number of other freelance people and writers, so upon returning to the United States, the word certainly spread because of the articles and things that they wrote. And again, this is at a time when the Jackson 5 were really, really, hot, so all of that tied right in.

Towards the end of the interview, Westbrook discusses the influence of recordings and radio on the musical tastes of African listeners and the resulting demand for American music.

PKM: Yesterday, you mentioned that in the islands, the Caribbean, there was such an affinity for African American popular music. Can you talk about that? How they heard the music and their exposure to the music?

LW: Well, I don't know if they picked it up on the radio or if records were imported from the United States like in Nigeria, but they knew the Black American artists. They were very, very popular. But let's go back to Senegal. The Jackson 5 were well-known in Senegal even before they came. They were known through their music. It was the same in Nigeria. Black American artists were known through their music. But now there's another side of the coin: ironically, the most popular artists in Kenya were country and western artists. I couldn't understand that. Well, what was happening was that the music scene in Kenya was dominated by EMI, which is an English company. EMI had all of those country and western artists, so that's what they were selling and exploiting in Kenya. People fall in love with what they hear. This was what they heard, so consequently the country and western artists [were popular] in Kenya.

Now this is East Africa, which is far away from West Africa, and even the culture's so different. Then I took an analysis of myself. I love country and western music. Well, I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. This was sort of early, prior to when WDIA started playing black music, so if you listened to the radio, all you heard was country and western artists. I fell in love with it, too. Even to this day, I love country and western music. So you cater to what you were exposed to, and that's what was happening in East Africa. And in West Africa, they heard black American music, so that's what they were in love with.

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