

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Haki Madhubuti

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Madhubuti, Haki R., 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 14, 2002 and December 20, 1999
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	1999 and 2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:21:33).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Author Haki Madhubuti (1942 - ) launched the Third World Press, in Chicago along with two partners, in 1967. Madhubuti and his wife, Safisha, are the founders of the Institute of Positive Education/New Concept School, a Chicago-based grade school that promotes an Afrocentric curriculum. Madhubuti has written more twenty-two books of essays and poetry in his lifetime. Madhubuti was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 14, 2002 and December 20, 1999, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A1999_006
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Poet, essayist, and entrepreneur Haki Madhubuti embodies the true spirit of a renaissance man as he moves seamlessly through the worlds of literature, business and education. Born in Detroit, Michigan and moving to Chicago after his mother's death, Madhubuti would sow the seeds that later led to his success. After graduation from high school, Madhubuti (known then as Don Lee) was drafted into military service, where he used books as his escape. After his tour of duty, he returned to Chicago and immersed himself in the black arts world.

Madhubuti became apprentice and curator at the DuSable Museum of African History in 1963 and worked closely with Margaret Burroughs, a scholar of pan-African history. During the four years he spent at the museum with Burroughs, Madhubuti met some of the most prominent forces in the African American arts community, including Gwendolyn Brooks, who encouraged him to publish a collection of his poetry. The result, *Think Black*, appeared in 1966 and was entirely self-published and distributed. After selling several hundred copies of *Think Black* within a week, Madhubuti realized that the dream of independent publishing -- free from established corporate interests -- could be attained. The following year, Madhubuti and two partners launched the Third World Press in the basement of his Chicago apartment with \$400 and a mimeograph machine. In this humble setting, an institution was born.

Among the distinguished authors who Third World Press has published are celebrated playwright and essayist Amiri Baraka, scholar Chancellor Williams and renowned poet Gwendolyn Brooks, who has published the second volume of her autobiography and several books of poetry with the independent press. Among Madhubuti's own writings to emerge from Third World are *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The African American Family In Transition* (1990); *Claiming Earth* (1994); *GroundWorks* (1996); and *HeartLove: Wedding and Love Poems* (1998). One of the many extraordinary aspects of Madhubuti's career is that he has published more than twenty-

two books of essays and poetry and has become one of the most prominent African American authors of his time without having ever relied on a larger, more-established publishing company.

Madhubuti serves as the director of the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University, which hosts the annual National Black Writers Conference. He and his wife, Safisha, are the founders of the Institute of Positive Education/New Concept School, a Chicago-based grade school that promotes an Afrocentric curriculum. Madhubuti is the recipient of fellowships from both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1984 he was presented with the Distinguished Writers Award from the Middle Atlantic Writers Association. He is also the 1993 recipient of the Paul Robeson Award from the African-American Arts Alliance.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Haki Madhubuti was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 14, 2002 and December 20, 1999, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Author Haki Madhubuti (1942 - ) launched the Third World Press, in Chicago along with two partners, in 1967. Madhubuti and his wife, Safisha, are the founders of the Institute of Positive Education/New Concept School, a Chicago-based grade school that promotes an Afrocentric curriculum. Madhubuti has written more twenty-two books of essays and poetry in his lifetime.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Madhubuti, Haki R., 1942-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Madhubuti, Haki R., 1942- --Interviews

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African American authors--Interviews.

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African American publishers--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Author

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, April 14, 2002 and December 20, 1999. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Poet and scholar Haki R. Madhubuti describes his tumultuous childhood starting with brief descriptions of his mother and father, who never lived together in the same house. Madhubuti describes some of the jobs his mother held, noting that her drug abuse eventually led her to resort to prostitution. Madhubuti explains why he became interested in African American literature, citing Richard Wright as his initial inspiration. Madhubuti briefly recalls his mother's murder and funeral, leading him to move from Detroit to Chicago. He describes his first job in Chicago as a traveling magazine salesman, which eventually led him to military service. Madhubuti recalls his run-in with an intolerant drill sergeant on his first day of basic training. Madhubuti details his increasing interest in African American literature and ideologies while in the military, which led him to take college courses. Madhubuti explains how the Birmingham, Alabama church bombing in 1963 inspired him to become an activist in the Civil Rights Movement.

Childhood and youth.

Poverty.

Prostitution.

Murder.

African American mothers.

United States Armed Forces--African Americans.

Literature.

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti briefly explains the impact of Malcolm X on his life. Madhubuti talks about his many mentors who inspired him to be a critical thinker and institution builder, including Dr. Margaret Burroughs, Charlie Burroughs, Dudley Randall, Hoyt W. Fuller, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Madhubuti talks about his early interest in African American literature, and how this interest blossomed into a writing career. Madhubuti details the hostile urban environment in which he was raised, explaining how literature and his military training allowed him to overcome it. Madhubuti describes his relationship with his father, who was largely absent, and explains that his mentors provided him with the qualities needed to be a good man and a good father. Madhubuti credits his early interest in scholarly reading and his work ethic for his success in writing and in institution building. Finally, Madhubuti describes his participation in the Civil Rights Movement, particularly his involvement in Chicago-based activities.

Mentoring.

Literature.

African American fathers.

Civil rights movements--Illinois--Chicago.

Creative writing.

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti discusses the importance of the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and explains how it helped to nurture him and other young black writers. He describes his first academic job, as a writer in residence at Cornell University, including his role in the armed student takeover of a campus building in 1969. Madhubuti details his subsequent position at Howard University, explaining how he became involved in Pan-Africanism during his time there. He stresses the importance of ownership in the Black Arts Movement, detailing his struggle to buy and improve real estate for his various institutions, focusing on the relocation of the Institute of Positive Learning in the late 1980s. Madhubuti describes his role in Minister Louis Farrakhan's rise to power in the Nation of Islam. Finally, Madhubuti discusses his close personal relationship with his mentor, Gwendolyn Brooks.

Organization of Black American Culture.

Cornell University.

Howard University.

Black Arts movement.

Farrakhan, Louis.

Brooks, Gwendolyn, 1917-2000.

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti tells the story of meeting his wife, and details how she became closely involved with his work in building institutions. Madhubuti then briefly describes his time spent at the University of Iowa earning a MFA. He cites his struggles in life with giving him the qualities needed to succeed in his career, detailing his and his wife's determination to succeed. Madhubuti talks about his conflicts with Ebony magazine, later giving a detailed comparison of Ebony and his own work as a poet and a publisher. Before the comparison, Madhubuti explains the influence of Hoyt W. Fuller on his work, and briefly shares his thoughts on the Nation of Islam. Madhubuti explains why he chose poetry over other forms of writing and why he decided to start his own publishing company. Finally, Madhubuti describes how his values and philosophy have influenced his past work, and explains how they shape his goals for future work.

Marriage.

University of Iowa.

Ebony (Chicago, Ill.).

Fuller, Hoyt, 1923-1981.

Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.).

Poetry.

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:49 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti explains how he became involved with multicultural men's work at the request of poet Robert Bly. Madhubuti discusses this work in several subsequent segments, believing it is very valuable to establish relationships with people of different races and ethnic groups. Madhubuti outlines the future plans of Third World Press, and foresees future emphasis on fiction while maintaining the press's political roots. Madhubuti discusses the positive impact of his educational institutions, crediting their African-centered curricula with improving the lives of students and their families. Madhubuti pauses to briefly criticize materialism and its negative impact on the black middle class.

Madhubuti details his thoughts on the Civil Rights Movement, concluding that the resulting freedom was necessary, yet brought its own set of problems. Finally, Madhubuti details his experience organizing and participating in the Million Man March, praising its role in bringing together African American men from different religious, cultural, and class backgrounds.

Multiculturalism.

Publishers and publishing--Illinois--Chicago.

Education & culture.

Middle class African Americans.

Civil rights movements--United States.

Million Man March (1995 : Washington, D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_001\_006, TRT: 0:25:27 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti details his relationship with Betty Shabazz, explaining why he felt the need to establish a close relationship with her. He pays solemn tribute to Shabazz and other deceased African American leaders. Madhubuti explains how he hopes African Americans can become more empowered and increase their ownership of businesses and institutions, believing that African-centered thought can help to achieve this goal. Madhubuti discusses the success of contemporary black writers, hoping that they will continue to do positive community work. Madhubuti evaluates his own works, detailing how his writing style and values have changed over the years, prompted by his growing awareness of worldwide violence and corruption. After a brief evaluation of rap music as an artistic and political medium, Madhubuti discusses what he wishes his legacy to be -- that of a good writer. Finally, Madhubuti recalls finding his murdered mother's dead body, explaining the effects it had on him as a young man.

Shabazz, Betty.

African American authors.

Creative writing.

African American business enterprises.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Haki Madhubuti, Section A1999\_006\_002\_007, TRT: 0:23:47 ?

Haki R. Madhubuti narrates his photographs.

Photographs.