

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Baratunde Thurston

Overview of the Collection

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Thurston, Baratunde |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, |
| Dates: | April 7, 2014 and August 31, 2016 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2014 and 2016 |
| Physical Description: | 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:27:00). |
| Abstract: | Comedian and author Baratunde Thurston (1977 -) served as director of digital for 'The Onion' and co-founded Cultivated Wit in 2012. He is the author of <i>Better than Crying: Poking Fun at Politics, the Press & Pop Culture</i> (2004); <i>Keep Jerry Falwell Away from My Oreo Cookies</i> (2005); <i>Thank You Congressional Pages (For Being So Damn Sexy!)</i> (2006); and the New York Times best-seller, <i>How To Be Black</i> (2012). Thurston was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 7, 2014 and August 31, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2014_100 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Comedian and writer Baratunde Rafiq Thurston was born on September 11, 1977 in Washington, D.C. Thurston graduated from the prestigious Sidwell Friends School in 1995, and received his A.B. degree in philosophy from Harvard University in 1999.

From 1999 to 2003, Thurston worked as an associate for Cambridge Strategic Management Group and the Management Network Group. He then worked as a contract senior consultant for Altman Vilandrie & Company, and as a contract producer and advisor for Untravel Media. In 2006, Thurston co-founded the black political blog *Jack & Jill Politics*. From 2007 to 2012, he served as digital director for the satirical news outlet, *The Onion*. In the summer of 2012, Thurston co-founded the comedy/technology startup, Cultivated Wit, where he serves as CEO. He also writes the monthly back page column for *Fast Company*, and has contributed to the *Huffington Post* and the *Weekly Dig*. In addition, he is a semi-regular panelist on the podcast *This Week in Tech*, and hosted the Discovery Science show *Popular Science's Future Of* in 2009 and 2010. He performs standup comedy in New York City and across the United States, as well as delivers keynotes at South by Southwest, Personal Democracy Forum, and the Guardian Changing Media Summit. In May 2011, Thurston spoke at the presidential palace in Tbilisi, Georgia on the role of satire in a healthy democracy, and he has advised The White House on digital strategy and public engagement. In January of 2012, Thurston joined the MIT Media Lab as a director's fellow. He has been featured on CNN, NPR, BBC, and C-SPAN, as well as in the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe*.

Thurston has authored four books: *Better than Crying: Poking Fun at Politics, the Press & Pop Culture* (2004); *Keep Jerry Falwell Away from My Oreo Cookies* (2005); *Thank You Congressional Pages (For Being So Damn Sexy!)* (2006); and the New York Times best-seller, *How To Be Black* (2012).

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan honored Thurston “for changing the political and social landscape one laugh at a time.” He was also nominated for the Bill Hicks Award for Thought Provoking Comedy. *The Root* added him to its list of 100 most influential African Americans, and *Fast Company* listed him as one of the 100 Most Creative People In Business.

Thurston lives in New York, New York.

Baratunde Thurston was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 7, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Baratunde Thurston was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 7, 2014 and August 31, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Comedian and author Baratunde Thurston (1977 -) served as director of digital for 'The Onion' and co-founded Cultivated Wit in 2012. He is the author of *Better than Crying: Poking Fun at Politics, the Press & Pop Culture* (2004); *Keep Jerry Falwell Away from My Oreo Cookies* (2005); *Thank You Congressional Pages (For Being So Damn Sexy!)* (2006); and the New York Times best-seller, *How To Be Black* (2012).

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

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

Restrictions on Use

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

Related Material

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

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Thurston, Baratunde

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Thurston, Baratunde--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Comedian

Author

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Baratunde Thurston, April 7, 2014 and August 31, 2016. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

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

Other Finding Aid

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

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_001_001, TRT: 1:29:03 ?

Baratunde Thurston was born on September 11, 1977 in Washington, D.C. His maternal great-grandfather, Benjamin Lonesome was born into slavery in Virginia during the 1970s. Thurston's maternal grandmother, Lorraine Martin, was the first black person to work as a clerk for the Supreme Court of the United States. Thurston talks about the different complexions in his maternal family and the strain it placed between his mother and grandmother. His mother, Arnita Thurston, was raised in Washington, D.C. where she was politically active in pan-African Black Power groups and knew Stokely Carmichael. Thurston's father, Arnold Robinson, was a construction worker and died when Thurston was young. Thurston talks about his parents' relationship and his own childhood personality. He also describes the stark contrast in his mother during his older sister's childhood and his own. By the time he was born, his mother no longer smoked or drank.

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_001_002, TRT: 2:28:46 ?

Baratunde Thurston continues to describe the change in his mother between his sister's and his childhoods. Although he does not share a father with his sister, Belinda Thurston, who is nine years older, Thurston does not consider her to be a half-sibling. Thurston remembers learning to play the violin and the bass as a young boy. One of his earliest childhood memories is receiving a skin graft after badly burning his foot. He recalls the changing dynamics in his childhood neighborhood and his mother's decision to move from Washington D.C.'s Columbia Heights neighborhood to Takoma Park, Maryland to escape the crack epidemic. He also reflects upon HistoryMaker Marion Barry's political career from his civil rights activism to tenure as the mayor of Washington, D.C. In Washington, D.C., Thurston was enrolled in the Head Start Program before attending Bancroft Elementary School and then the Sidwell Friends School in 1989. He describes his childhood interests in music, science fiction, and video games.

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_001_003, TRT: 3:31:26 ?

In 1989 in seventh grade, Baratunde Thurston began attending Sidwell Friends School, in Washington, D.C. Thurston talks about his experience at Sidwell and Chelsea Clinton's enrollment while he was a student there. At the suggestion of his school principal who was also African American, Thurston o joined Ankobia, a pan-African group. Ankobia taught African Americans their history and connections to the African continent. While at Sidwell, Thurston also developed a love for the performing and literary arts. He talks about a paper he wrote while at Sidwell and racially biased conclusions about the self-segregation of youth. Thurston also talks about a school trip to Senegal, the 1995 Million Man March, and his favorite teachers at Sidwell, including HistoryMaker Rickey Payton, who was the school's music director. After graduating from Sidwell Friends School in 1995, Thurston enrolled at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_004, TRT:

4:29:51 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_005, TRT:
5:32:45 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_006, TRT:
6:28:47 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_007, TRT:
7:30:22 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_008, TRT:
8:29:26 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Baratunde Thurston, Section A2014_100_002_009, TRT:
9:26:34 ?