

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Michaela Angela Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Michaela Angela, 1964-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis,
Dates:	August 15, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:19:04).
Abstract:	Magazine editor, activist, and writer Michaela Angela Davis (1964 -) was the founding fashion director of Vibe magazine and a former editor of Honey and Essence magazines. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 15, 2014, in Brooklyn, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_219
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine editor, activist, and writer Michaela Angela Davis was born in March 31, 1964 in Landstuhl, Germany. When she was young, Davis and her family moved to Washington, D.C., where she attended the Duke Ellington School for the Arts. Upon graduation, Davis enrolled in New York University's Tisch School of the Arts before being accepted to the Stella Adler Acting Conservatory in 1983. She gained fashion experience by apprenticing with her aunt, a former stylist for Harper's Bazaar, and photographer Richard Avedon.

In 1991, Davis was hired as an associate fashion editor for *Essence* magazine. She then became the founding fashion director for *Vibe* magazine in 1993. In 2002, Davis worked as a stylist for the film *Paid in Full*, before becoming editor-in-chief of *Honey* magazine in 2003. Davis also published an essay titled "The Beautiful Ones" for the anthology *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture* in 2003.

In 2004, Davis returned to *Essence* as the executive Fashion and Beauty editor while simultaneously directing the Culture section. She launched the "Take Back the Music" campaign along with *Essence* in 2005 and appeared on *VH1 News Presents: Hip Hop Videos – Sexploitation on the Set*. That same year, Davis authored a gift book entitled *Beloved Baby: A Baby's Scrapbook and Journal*. In 2008, she was featured in the documentary *The Souls of Black Girls*, as well as the BET special, *Hip Hop vs. America II: Where Did the Love Go?* Davis went on to become the chief creative consultant and editorial brand manager for the rebranding of BET. She appeared in *Black Cool: One Thousand Streams of Blackness* in 2011 with an essay titled "Resistance." Also that year, she launched a community conversation project called MAD Free: Liberating Conversations About Our Image, Beauty and Power as well as "BuryTheRatchet: The Revolutionary Pro Sisterhood Campaign" the following year.

The New York Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People recognized Davis as a "Phenomenal Woman" in 2011, and the President of the Borough of Manhattan presented her with a "Trailblazer Award." In 2013, she was honored with two separate "Empowerment" awards from BLACK STREET and the Feminist Press.

Davis lives in Brooklyn and has one daughter, Elenni Davis-Knight.

Michaela Angela Davis was interviewed by the *The HistoryMakers* on August 15, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Michaela Angela Davis was conducted by Harriette Cole on August 15, 2014, in Brooklyn, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine editor, activist, and writer Michaela Angela Davis (1964 -) was the founding fashion director of Vibe magazine and a former editor of Honey and Essence magazines.

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:

Davis, Michaela Angela, 1964-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Michaela Angela, 1964---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine Editor

Activist

Writer

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 Michaela Angela Davis, August 15, 2014. 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 Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_001, TRT: 1:29:44 ?

Michaela Angela Davis was born on March 31, 1964 in Landstuhl, Germany to Helen Butler Delaney and Harold Davis, Sr. Davis' father was born to Lucille Davis in Camden, New Jersey, and attended La Salle College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania before enlisting in the U.S. military. Davis' maternal grandfather, John Butler, worked as a police officer in Philadelphia, where Davis' mother attended the Philadelphia High School for Girls and Temple University. There, she met Davis' father, who was a law student. Shortly afterwards, they married and moved to a military base in Germany, where Davis was born. One year later, Davis' family returned to Philadelphia, and her father completed law school. After graduating, he became a mediator for the federal government, and moved the family to Woodbury, New Jersey. Davis' father was abusive, and her mother struggled for years to obtain a divorce. Afterwards, Davis' father joined the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, where he met his second wife, Carlota Velarde Davis.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_002, TRT: 2:29:00 ?

Michaela Angela Davis' maternal grandmother, Precious Tindal Butler, was born to a Native American father and German and Syrian mother in Sumter, South Carolina. Davis' grandfather, John Butler, was also from Sumter, and had African American and Irish parents. Due to her mixed ancestry, Davis' mother was light skinned. In order to survive in the segregated South, she and her siblings were encouraged to marry other light skinned African Americans, because it was easier for lighter people to avoid violence and move up economically. As a result, Davis' grandfather was able to relocate the family to a middle class neighborhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Davis spent her early childhood in Philadelphia, and moved to an affluent black neighborhood in Washington, D.C. at seven years old. There, Davis and her family were considered eccentric because of their taste for international food and cars. During this time, Davis met her best friend, Debbie Chandler, and saw Shirley Chisholm run for president.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_003, TRT: 3:29:12 ?

Michaela Angela Davis grew up during the 1970s in an affluent African American neighborhood of Washington, D.C. There, she listened to popular recording artists like Parliament Funkadelic, as well as the classical music of Richard Wagner. Davis was educated in the public schools of Washington, D.C., and attended a Catholic church with her family. As she grew older, Davis started questioning the church's teachings. After the sudden death of her brother, Eddie Davis, she left the church and began studying metaphysical spirituality. At the time, Davis was a theater major at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. After graduating in 1982, she moved to New York City to study at the Stella Adler Conservatory. Initially, Davis was cast in the lead roles of classical plays. However, after the professors learned she was black, they began casting her in stereotypical roles. When this happened, Davis decided to leave the school and work full time as an assistant stylist with her maternal aunt, Joanne Baker Butler.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_004, TRT: 4:29:33 ?

Michaela Angela Davis worked as an assistant fashion stylist in New York City

with her maternal aunt, Joanne Baker Butler. In this role, she helped create advertising campaigns for brands like Virginia Slims and Calvin Klein. While working in New York City's fashion industry, Davis began attending dance parties at underground venues like The Loft and Paradise Garage, and fell into the club scene of the 1980s. After street artist Michael Stewart was beaten to death by police, Davis decided to leave the scene, and returned home to Washington, D.C. There, she began a successful career as the lead stylist for catalog photographer Ruven Afanador. Around the same time, she met Ezra Knight and became pregnant with her daughter, Elenni Davis-Knight. Davis returned to New York City to work at Essence magazine in 1991. After one year, she became the fashion director of the newly founded Vibe magazine. The publication focused on hip hop culture and emerging artists like Tupac Shakur, Treach and Snoop Dogg.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_005, TRT: 5:28:48 ?

Michaela Angela Davis worked as the fashion director at Vibe magazine in the early 1990s. At that time, hip hop culture began changing under the influence of Corporate America. Many female artists were ignored, and the genre's overall portrayal of women became hypersexual and violent. Seeing this trend, Davis resigned from Vibe magazine and began working as a freelance designer for musical artists like Meshell Ndegeocello. She became interested in a new magazine, Honey, which was created for African American women. Although the magazine was initially promising, it soon lost its intellectual perspective. Wanting to help, Davis met with editor in chief Amy DuBois Barnett as well as the owners, Keith Clinkscales and Leonard Burnett, Jr., and was hired as a fashion editor. Six months later, Barnett left the magazine, and Davis was promoted to editor in chief. One year later, Honey magazine shut down. Davis then returned to Essence, where she created a female empowerment campaign called Take Back the Music.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_006, TRT: 6:29:52 ?

Michaela Angela Davis used her position as a fashion editor at Essence magazine to advocate on behalf of black women. With Akiba Solomon, she created the Take Back the Music campaign to fight against the negative portrayal of women in hip hop. As a result of the campaign's success, Davis branded herself as an image activist. She continued to garner recognition, and became a guest commentator on race and gender for CNN. She joined CNN's 'Anderson Cooper 360' show after protesting against Essence's hiring of a white fashion editor at New York Fashion Week. During her transition from Essence to CNN, Davis began mentoring young women through the MAD Free project, where she held conversations about image, power and beauty with successful women in fashion, filmmaking and related industries. Davis also served as a branding consultant for BET Networks under CEO Debra Lee. She was widely recognized for her activism, and received the Brooklyn Community Services Human Spirit Award.

Video Oral History Interview with Michaela Angela Davis, Section A2014_219_001_007, TRT: 7:22:55 ?

Michaela Angela Davis worked as a consultant on the rebranding of Black Entertainment Television (BET) alongside the network's senior vice president of creative services, Kendrick Reid. During that time, Davis created the Fly Girls Vote campaign, which encouraged young women and men to vote in the presidential election of 2008. At the time of the interview, Davis was working

on rebranding BET's second channel, Centric, as BET Her. While consulting at BET, Davis became a contributor on CNN, and spoke out about the shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Davis reflects upon her life and legacy, and describes how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.