



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Louis Cameron Gossett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Louis Cameron Gossett
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett,
Dates:	March 30, 2005, April 25, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005, 2005
Physical Description:	8 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:46:30).
Abstract:	Actor Louis Cameron Gossett (1936 -) is most well known for winning an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in "An Officer and a Gentleman." Gossett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 30, 2005, April 25, 2005, in Malibu, California, Malibu, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_086
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. was born May 27, 1936 in Sheepshead Bay, Coney Island to Hellen Rebecca Wray Gossett and Louis Gossett Sr.. Gossett's Brooklyn neighborhood nurtured activists and artists like Gustav Blum, Harvey Keitel, Neil Simon, Neil Diamond and Arthur Miller. Gossett attended PS 135 and was student body president of Mark Twain Junior High School (PS 209). When Gossett acted in a production of "You Can't Take It With You" at Abraham Lincoln High School, talent scouts picked him for Broadway's "Take A Giant Step," for which Gossett won the Donaldson Award in 1952 for best newcomer to theatre. In 1954, he appeared in "Desk Set" with Shirley Booth. After graduation Gossett received a basketball scholarship to New York University. The 6'4" Gossett, who also pitched against Sandy Koufax, was drafted by the New York Knickerbockers in 1958.

Deciding to forego sports for acting, Gossett studied at The Actors Studio with John Sticks and Peggy Fury. In 1961, Gossett's acting skills were soon noticed when he was cast in the Broadway production and movie "Raisin in the Sun." He was also in the all-star cast of 1961's "The Blacks" that featured James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson, Roscoe Lee Brown and Maya Angelou. Gossett later went on to appear in small television roles including: "The Bush Baby" and "Companions in Nightmare." Gossett briefly tried his hand at folk singing before he got his first big movie role in "The Landlord" with Diana Sands. Gossett has appeared in over 50 movies and hundreds of television shows between 1971 and 1999. Some of the more popular shows he appeared in (listed in chronological order) are: "Skin Game," "The Deep," "Don't Look Back: The Story of Leroy "Satchel" Paige," "Sadat," "Finders Keepers," "Enemy Mine," "Firewalker," "Iron Eagle," "A Gathering of Old Men," "The Principal," "The Father Clements Story," "Diggstown," "Return to Lonesome Dove," "Curse of the Starving Class," "A Good Man in Africa," "Ray Alexander," "Captive Heart: The James Mink Story," "Y2K," and "Lackawanna Blues." Gossett was awarded an Emmy for his portrayal of "Fiddler" in Alex Haley's miniseries

Roots (1977). He won a Golden Globe Award for HBO's "The Josephine Baker Story"(1991) and an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in "An Officer and a Gentleman"(1982).

Gossett's community involvement began in 1964, when he received a grant with James Earl Jones and Paul Sorvino to begin a theatre group for trouble bound youth. Gossett, who often plays strong role models, frequently speaks to youth groups about manhood, drugs and life. Gossett also partnered with Father George Clements to develop Shamba Centers to teach African American history and culture. Eracism is a non-profit that Gossett developed in an effort to combat racism in America and abroad. In 2005, he sponsored a Los Angeles anti-violence effort called One Summer of Peace.

Louis Gossett, Jr. was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers"on March 30, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Louis Cameron Gossett was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 30, 2005, April 25, 2005, in Malibu, California andMalibu, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacam SP videocassettes. Actor Louis Cameron Gossett (1936 -) is most well known for winning an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in "An Officer and a Gentleman."

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:

Gossett, Louis, 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Gossett, Louis, 1936---Interviews

African American actors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

ArtMakers

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 Louis Cameron Gossett, March 30, 2005, April 25, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/11/2011 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, March 30, 2005, April 25, 2005

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_001_001, TRT: 0:29:47 2005/03/30

Louis Gossett Jr. begins the interview by discussing his mother Hellen Rebecca Wray's side of the family. While recalling his mother's lineage, Gossett describes the lack of African American history in mainstream films, schools, and libraries. Due to this lack of African American history in society, Gossett develops Shamba Centers as centers used to inform African American youth about their history. Gossett discusses being a young boy in the 1950s and enduring segregation in the train system. He recalls riding in the cattle car when traveling through the southern states of Georgia, Maryland, and Washington D.C.; but then switching to first class once he was further north. Gossett remembers his childhood neighborhood in Coney Island as being a mix of Mafia, Jewish and African American families. Gossett remembers his neighborhood as being racially tolerant and nurturing some of the most influential minds like those of Neil Simon and Arthur Miller.

Bennettsville (S.C.)--Social life and customs--20th century

African American Families--Washington (D.C.).

Coney Island (New York, N.Y.)

Simon, Neil

Miller, Arthur, 1915-

Segregation in transportation--Southern States

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_001_002, TRT: 0:29:25 2005/03/30

Louis Gossett Jr. describes the people of Bennettsville, South Carolina as being known as the Geechie people. Gossett believes that the Geechies were likely descendants of the Igbo in Africa; they were proud and serious in their demeanor. He recalls how he only felt confident as a child when he was playing baseball or basketball. Gossett credits Gustave Blumberg, his teacher, as encouraging him to audition for "Take a Giant Step". Gossett then describes his family history; telling a story about how his father Louis Gamal Gossett helped the Mafia run gambling rings in Brooklyn, New York. Gossett admirably remembers growing up in Brooklyn; the success rate for local students was 65% and being taught by John Sticks and Peggy Fury.

Gullahs--History--South Carolina--Charleston County.

Mafia--United States--New York (state)--New York

Broadway (New York, N.Y.)

African American families--New York (State)--New York

Brooklyn (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_001_003, TRT: 0:28:12 2005/03/30

Louis Gossett Jr. goes into greater detail about being cast in "Take a Giant Step", and the culture that produced this type of play. Gossett sang in a group called the Gospel Brothers. The Gospel Brothers participated in gospel competitions against Ray Charles, Al Hibler, The Original Five Blind Boys, Dixie Hummingbirds, Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson, and The Mighty Clouds of

Joy. Gossett recalls the beginning of his television career as being cast in “The Red Buttons Show”, followed by “Seargent Bilko”, and then “You are There,” hosted by Walter Cronkite. Gossett recalls trying out for The New York Knicks but later deciding to perform in “A Raisin in the Sun” instead of playing basketball professionally. Gossett concludes this portion of the interview with a discussion of the Harlem Renaissance and his relationship with Frederick O’Neill.

Original Five Blind Boys of Alabama

Dixie Hummingbirds (Vocal group)

Wilson, Jackie

Mighty Clouds of Joy (Musical group)

Gospel music

Television broadcasting--Auditions

Hansberry, Lorraine, 1930-1965. Raisin in the sun

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_001_004, TRT: 0:28:37 2005/03/30

Louis Gossett Jr. remembers traveling to Wilmington, Delaware with actress Shirley Booth to audition for a play. While in Wilmington Gossett recalls experiencing his first instance of racism when he was refused service at a restaurant. Gossett shifts the discussion to the color lines that were apparent in the 1960s California television industry. Gossett was one of the first African Americans to have a hotel room at the Beverly Hills Hotel, a situation that caused the Beverly Hills police to handcuff him to a tree while they checked with hotel administration to verify his residency at the hotel. Gossett goes on to discuss his being cast as Copee Johnson in his first major movie “The Landlord” directed Hal Aspirin. The first movie Gossett was ever in was “The Bush Baby” directed by John Trent which was shot in Kenya and Tanzania.

Racism--Deleware--Wilimington

Racism--California--Beverly Hills

Hollywood (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Beverly Hills Hotel

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_001_005, TRT: 0:29:03 2005/03/30

Louis Gossett Jr. discusses the power and political history of Patrice Lumumba and United Nations Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. Gossett talks about the time he spent in London working for a Shakespeare company called The Old Vic Company. He also describes the origins and impact of “Roots”, his role as Fiddler and Alex Haley. Gossett goes on to talk about his surprise as being cast as Sergeant Emil Foley in “An Officer and a Gentleman,” because he was the only African American actor that auditioned for the part. He divulges the little known fact that the inspiration for Emil Foley came from a man name Richard Dawer, the head of the Marine Corp Recruit Depot in San Diego, California. Gossett praises Magic Johnson for his business investments and his initiative to gentrify African American communities. He believes that African Americans must financially invest in themselves in order to give back to the American society.

African American actors--television

African American actors--movies

Officer and a Gentleman (Motion picture)

Roots (Television program)

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_002_006, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/04/25

Louis Gossett Jr. describes the irony of winning an Oscar in 1982 for his part in “An Officer and a Gentleman” , but not being able to find work afterwards. Around the same time, Gossett began to party a lot, consuming various illicit drugs, and socializing with an unsavory mix of people. Gossett claims that he stopped partying when he reconnected with God. Gossett discusses the dual personality he has, one side is his public image and the other suffers in private at home. He then recalls the acting methods he used in many of his films such as; “Sadat”, “The Father Clements Story” and The Principle. Gossett acknowledges being type cast in most films as a mentor. Gossett discusses some of the projects he is working on such as; "The Liberators 761st Tank Regiment", "Haile Selassie", "Cleopatra", "Kwame Nkrumah", and "Timbuktu".
Drug addiction--United States.

Academy Awards (Motion pictures)--People--1980-1990.

Method Acting--Drama.

Officer and a Gentleman (Motion picture).

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_002_007, TRT: 0:27:30 2005/04/25

Louis Gossett Jr. discusses the importance of producing films that tell the African American side of mainstream history, including such historic people as Hannibal. He then reflects on some of the productions he has been in such as "Captive Heart: The James Mink Story", "Lackawanna Blues", and "Stargate: SG-1". Gossett shares his desire to provide a venue for African American writers in film and TV. He reflects on how African Americans can become equal in Hollywood by owning their own production companies. Gossett aspires to one day play Lincoln Perry (also known as Stepin' Fetchit) in an effort to clear his name of the Uncle Tom/Coon image. He continues to discuss Perry at length all the while continuing to cite the importance of clearing his name and elevating his public persona. Gossett explains why he thinks his strongest performances as an actor were in “Diggstown” and “Enemy Mine”.

Fetchit, Stepin

African American motion picture producers and directors.

Lackawanna blues (Motion picture)

Stargate SG-1 (Television program)

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Section A2005_086_002_008, TRT: 0:24:26 2005/04/25

Louis Gossett Jr. discusses his acting method in great detail. He describes the sources for his material, the challenge of making acting appear fresh although he is a learned actor, and the differences between movies and made for television movies. Gossett lists his favorite actors and actresses: Sidney Poitier, Marlon Brando, Anthony Quinn, Robert DeNiro, Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, and Jane Fonda. In closing, Gossett narrates photographs of his family and friends.

Method Acting--Drama.

Mentoring in the arts--United States

Role models--United States