



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Antwone Fisher

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Antwone Fisher |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, |
| Dates: | April 19, 2007, September 19, 2008 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007, 2008 |
| Physical Description: | 10 Betacam SP videocassettes (4:31:35). |
| Abstract: | Author and screenwriter Antwone Fisher (1959 -) wrote and co-produced the book and film versions of his autobiography. His other screenwriting credits include "ATL", "Rush Hour", and "Money Talks". Fisher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2007, September 19, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2007_150 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Screenwriter and author Antwone Quenton Fisher was born on August 3, 1959 in a women's prison outside of Cleveland, Ohio to seventeen-year-old Eva Mae Fisher and twenty-three-year-old Edward Elkins. His mother named him for pianist Antoine "Fats" Domino, and his father was killed before he was born. As a result, Fisher grew up in several foster homes, without having known his parents. Twelve years of his childhood were spent with a foster family named the Picketts, a middle-aged couple whose children were already grown. During his time with the Picketts, Fisher was beaten physically, sexually abused by a neighbor and family friend, and emotionally neglected. For many years, his foster father did not even acknowledge whether he knew Fisher's name. After one fight with Mrs. Pickett, Fisher was kicked out of the home and forced to return to social services.

For high school, Fisher attended George Junior Republic School, a specialized school for young men from disadvantaged circumstances located in western Pennsylvania. While attending school, he met social worker Bill Ward, who was a significant and positive influence in Fisher's life. When Fisher graduated, he moved into a Cleveland YMCA. Seeking protection for the numerous predators in the neighborhood, Fisher entered into the criminal world of Cleveland by collecting money from prostitutes for a local pimp named Butch. For the latter half of 1977, Fisher was homeless and slept wherever he could find some shelter, usually on the campus of Cleveland State University.

Fisher joined the United States Navy in 1978, where he spent eleven years in the service. He began to receive counseling from a Naval psychiatrist, Lieutenant Commander Williams. Williams helped motivate Fisher to discover his own origins. After his discharge from the Navy, Fisher became a federal corrections officer for the Federal Bureau of Prisons for three years. He then began working as a security guard for Sony Pictures, and resolved to discover the whereabouts of his biological family. After some research, Fisher contacted his aunt,

Annette Elkins and was able to meet his biological family, including his mother, Eva Mae. In 1996, Fisher married his wife, LaNette Fisher, with whom he has two children.

In 2001, Fisher published his autobiography, "Finding Fish". After this, Fisher fielded several competing offers for the film rights. After declining several offers, he ultimately sold the rights to his story to 20th Century Fox. Shortly thereafter, the film "Antwone Fisher" was released with actor Derek Luke portraying the title character. The film was directed by Denzel Washington, who portrayed Commander Williams. Fisher's other writing credits include work on the films "Money Talks", "Rush Hour" and "ATL". In 2005, Fisher released a book of his own poetry entitled "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?"

Antwone Fisher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Antwone Fisher was conducted by Paul Brock on April 19, 2007 and by Larry Crowe on September 19, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 10 Betacam SP videocassettes. Author and screenwriter Antwone Fisher (1959 -) wrote and co-produced the book and film versions of his autobiography. His other screenwriting credits include "ATL", "Rush Hour", and "Money Talks".

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:

Fisher, Antwone Quenton

Brock, Paul Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew

Stearns, Scott

(Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Fisher, Antwone Quenton--Interviews

African American screenwriters--Interviews.

African American sailors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

EntertainmentMakers

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 Antwone Fisher, April 19, 2007, September 19, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/25/2011 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, April 19, 2007, September 19, 2008

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_001, TRT: 0:26:42
2007/04/19

Antwone Fisher discusses his knowledge about his family background. His paternal grandparents felt aggrieved and cheated out of great wealth in the form of inheritance. Fisher mentions that his paternal grandfather spent his entire life in fruitless attempts to get an inheritance to which he felt entitled; he once allegedly refused \$10 million. Fisher remembers being taken away from Nellie Strange, his first foster mother, when he was quite young. Mrs. Strange was the only foster parent Fisher would describe as loving. He describes himself as being quite intuitive even as a child.

African American grandparents.

African American children--Ohio--Cleveland.

Foster children--Ohio--Cleveland.

Foster home care--Ohio.

Children of women prisoners--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_002, TRT: 0:27:52
2007/04/19

Antwone Fisher explains he had two foster homes before he was sent to the Packs, his foster family for twelve years. The Packs had nine children, although there were only three remaining in the household when Antwone Fisher arrived. He recounts his life in the Pack household. He describes the environment as a psychologically, sexually, and physically abusive one where Fisher was frequently tied up in basement. Fisher posits that his foster mother felt cheated in life. She wanted her foster children to remain small and cute, and once they reached adolescence, she began to take emotionally and psychologically damaged Vietnam veterans into the house. During this time, Fisher had thirteen foster care caseworkers, none of whom ever suspected abuse.

Foster home care--Ohio.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Veterans--Mental health.

Adult child abuse victims--United States.

Child sexual abuse--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_003, TRT: 0:29:14
2007/04/19

Antwone Fisher describes his childhood neighborhood. He remembers the decorative lights on the houses at Christmas, a holiday his foster family celebrated, but Fisher did not receive presents. Ethel, one of the remaining biological children, gave him a shirt one year. Fisher depicts the foster family's abusive dynamic. Mr. Pack felt guilty about punishing Antwone, and race was not discussed in the house; Antwone learned about race from television. In fact,

he thought Martin Luther King, Jr. was bad because King clashed with the police, and the police were always good. Wayne Bell, his foster brother, was a budding young intellectual whose ambition was destroyed by the environment; he later became a criminal. A minister who was invited to live with them raped Fisher's foster sister, Valerie Dixon, when she was thirteen. The foster mother took her to have an illegal abortion. Valerie was left unable to bear any children, and she later died a tragic death.

Foster home care--Psychological aspects.

Sexually abused children--Ohio.

Foster children--Family relationships.

Civil rights movements--Press coverage--United States.

Adult child abuse victims--United States.

Criminal behavior--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_004, TRT: 0:28:31
2007/04/19

Antwone Fisher continues to discuss his foster siblings. Wayne Bell, his foster brother, has spent almost twenty years of his life in prison. In fact, Wayne was in prison when he discovered Fisher had written the book "Finding Fish." Fisher believes that the foster family destroyed Wayne, with whom Fisher had a close but violent and tempestuous relationship as a child. He describes the Pack environment as "shame-based" in regards to sex, especially when Elder Taylor, the young, "refined pimp" minister who smelled of cologne, raped Valerie. Fisher also spoke of another foster brother, Kevin, who was half-white and favored by Mrs. Pack. Kevin's Caucasian mother repeatedly sought him out, then spurned him, and he was later molested by a friend of his mother's. Kevin eventually burned his mother's house down and later went to prison. Wayne reconnected with his mother, but she abandoned him again.

Child sexual abuse by clergy--United States.

Racially mixed children--Psychological aspects.

Foster children--Psychological aspects.

Sexually abused children--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_005, TRT: 0:28:41
2007/04/19

Antwone Fisher recounts memories from his adolescence. He fought frequently because he had no power in the Pack home. Although he was dyslexic, Fisher often dispensed medicine to the veterans Mrs. Pack took in because she often neglected to do so. Mrs. Pack had a sister named Esther in Mississippi, and she decided to retire there when Fisher was fourteen. She concocted an excuse to pick a fight with Antwone and used this as a pretext to kick him out; he had fifty cents and a paper bag containing his clothes. Fisher was sent to the Metzenbaum Children's Center where he first experienced racism, and later he was transferred to Boys Town in Cleveland. Finally, he ended up at George Junior Republic (GJR), an all-boys reform school in western Pennsylvania. He remembers being deloused upon arrival. At GJR, Fisher learned to enjoy music and met Uncle Dave, a white man he came to admire.

African American teenage boys--Attitudes.

High school students--United States--Attitudes.

Boys--Ohio--Societies and clubs.

George Junior Republic (Grove City, Pa.)

Dyslexic children--United States.

Foster home care--Ohio--Cleveland.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_006, TRT: 0:29:00
2008/09/19

Antwone Fisher began George Junior Republic as a suspicious teenager with a fatalistic attitude. Upon graduation in 1977, Fisher emerged with several vocational certificates and a social worker, Bill Ward, who treated him very well. The evening of his graduation, Ward drove Fisher back to Cleveland, Ohio and deposited him at a YMCA that was functioning as a men's shelter. After being sexually propositioned by other men at the shelter, Fisher accepted a job doing odd jobs for Butch, a neighborhood pimp and minor drug dealer. Although the job offered some level of protection for Fisher, he soon realized he did not have the moral bankruptcy required to work for Butch. Fisher took a few pieces of clothing from the shelter and walked away from his life there. Thus began a six month period of homelessness for Fisher.

George Junior Republic (Grove City, Pa.)

Social workers--Pennsylvania.

Prostitution--Ohio--Cleveland.

Drug dealers--Ohio--Cleveland.

Cleveland (Ohio)--Social conditions--20th century.

Homelessness--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_007, TRT: 0:30:30
2008/09/19

Antwone Fisher describes his life of homelessness after leaving Butch. Shortly after leaving the shelter, he walked back to the neighborhood he'd lived in with the Packs and met a childhood friend, Jesse. He stayed with Jesse for a couple of weeks, but Jesse was soon killed in a shooting that Fisher witnessed. He acknowledges that he was probably traumatized by this event, and wandered around the city for days afterwards. As the seasons changed and the weather turned cold, it became more difficult for Fisher to find food and methods for keeping warm. He spent much of that fall on the campus of Cleveland State University, living on whatever was left lying around by students. Fisher recounts the circumstances of his joining the U.S. Navy and his distinct memory of that day, especially the first bath he had in several months. He shares his memories of his emotional counseling with Lieutenant Commander Williams.

Homelessness--Ohio--Cleveland.

Violent crime--Ohio--Cleveland.

Post-traumatic stress disorder in adolescence.

United States.--Navy--Recruiting, enlistment, etc.

United States. Navy--African Americans.

African American sailors.

Psychotherapy.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_008, TRT: 0:29:20
2008/09/19

Antwone Fisher recalls his service with the Navy and elucidates ways in which it transformed his life. He refers to the Navy as his greatest education and considers several of the people he encountered while in the Navy as people

who raised him. Fisher describes his decision to leave the Navy in 1989 and his career path after discharge. He worked as a federal corrections officer for three years then became a security guard for Sony Pictures, a position which transformed his life once again. During this time, Fisher began to search for the whereabouts of his birth parents. He began with only his father's name, the knowledge that he had died before Fisher's birth, and a Cleveland phone book. Fisher was able to locate his father's relatives with surprisingly little effort. During a Thanksgiving visit with his father's relatives, Fisher was surprised to learn they had located his mother as a surprise for him. He describes the revelatory reunion with his mother.

Military service.

United States.--Navy--African Americans.

United States. Bureau of Prisons--Officials and employees.

Sony Pictures Entertainment, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_009, TRT: 0:28:50
2008/09/19

Antwone Fisher discusses his decision to write his life story as a screenplay while still working at Sony Pictures. He had made several contacts through the security job. Producer Todd Black optioned the screenplay, and shortly thereafter made a deal with Fox to produce the film. Fisher recalls the moment he decided to pursue writing as his vocation and lists several writing accomplishments of which he is especially proud because he is dyslexic. Fisher completed his screenplay in 1993 and wrote the book "Finding Fish" afterwards. The movie "Antwone Fisher" was finally filmed in 2002 and was directed by Denzel Washington in his directorial debut. Fisher recounts meeting his wife in 1996 while on the Sony Pictures lot for a development meeting. He acknowledges the differences in making a biopic about a person who is not famous and is still living; he mentions he had more power than the subject the film usually has. He notes the differences between Antwone the person, Antwone the filmmaker, and Antwone the character and describes the powerful opening scene of the film.

African American motion picture producers and directors.

Dyslexics.

Biographical films.

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

Washington, Denzel, 1954-

Fisher, Antwone Quenton.

Motion picture industry--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_010, TRT: 0:12:55
2008/09/19

Antwone Fisher discusses his current writing projects. Fisher discusses his current writing projects and mentions that his poem "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?", a poem he wrote when he was sixteen, will appear in Nikki Giovanni's poetry book for children. He answers philosophical questions and discloses that he would prefer his legacy to be the recognition he has brought to foster children, the tragedy of a child who is completely alone and the shortcomings of the foster care system.

African American screenwriters.

African American poets.

Giovanni, Nikki.

African Americans--Conduct of life.