

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruby Dee

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dee, Ruby
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Dee,
Dates:	October 18, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	Betacame SP videocassettes ().
Abstract:	Actress Ruby Dee (1924 - 2014) appeared in over fifty movies, including <i>A Raisin In The Sun</i> (1961), <i>Uptight</i> (1968), <i>Buck And The Preacher</i> (1972), <i>Roots</i> (1978), <i>Do The Right Thing</i> (1989), <i>The Delany Sisters: The First Hundred Years</i> (1999) and <i>American Gangster</i> (2007), which earned her an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Day was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 18, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_024
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress Ruby Dee was born Ruby Ann Wallace on October 27, 1924 in Cleveland, Ohio. Her family soon moved to New York, and Dee was raised during the golden age of Harlem. After high school, she attended New York City's Hunter College, graduating in 1945. Expressive and literate, Dee was drawn to the theatre while still a college student. Dee acted in small Shakespearian productions and landed a role in the play *South Pacific* in 1943. She also began to study with the American Negro Theatre, where she would meet her future husband, Ossie Davis. They would fall in love during a cross-country tour of *Anna Lucasta*.

Ruby Dee's career as an actress was nothing short of phenomenal. A petite, intelligent actress of nuance and sensitivity, she was talented enough and lucky enough to garner some of the best roles for black women in the 1950s and 1960s. On stage, she was the first black woman to play lead roles at the American Shakespeare Festival. She won an Obie Award for her portrayal of "Lena" in Athol Fugard's *Boseman and Lena*, a Drama Desk Award for her role in Alice Childress' *Wedding Band* and an Ace Award for her performance in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Dee appeared in over fifty films. In 1950, she played Jackie Robinson's wife in *The Jackie Robinson Story* and forty years later she played his mother in the television production *The Court Martial of Jackie Robinson*. Her film credits include: *A Raisin In The Sun* (1961), *Uptight* (1968), *Buck And The Preacher* (1972), *Roots* (1978), *Do The Right Thing* (1989) and *The Delany Sisters: The First Hundred Years* (1999). Dee won an Emmy Award for her performance in the Hallmark Hall of Fame production *Decoration Day*. Throughout her film and television career, Dee was selective and brought that selectivity and dignity to every role she played. She was particularly proud of her one-woman show, *Zora Is My Name*, about pioneering novelist, folklorist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston.

Dee and her husband were authors, storytellers and recording artists as well as actors. Her published works include the humorous *My One Good Nerve* and various recordings for young people. In 1998, Dee and Davis co-wrote the autobiographical book *With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together*, in which they take turns telling their stories as actors, activists, a married couple and as parents.

Dee's life was not all acting, however. She was a survivor of breast cancer for more than thirty years and was long active in a variety of movements. She, along with Davis, traveled to Lagos, Nigeria, as goodwill ambassadors, and eulogized Malcolm X in 1965 and later his widow, Betty Shabazz in 1997.

Jointly presented with The Academy of Television Arts and Science's Silver Circle Award in 1994, Dee and Davis officially became "national treasures" when they received the National Medal of Arts in 1995. In 2000, they were presented the Screen Actors Guild's Life Achievement Award. They were inductees in the Theater Hall of Fame as well as the NAACP Hall of Fame. In 2008, Dee was awarded the Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the film, *American Gangster*. She also received an Academy Award nomination for this role.

Ruby Dee was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 7, 2001.

Dee passed away on June 11, 2014 at the age of 91.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ruby Dee was conducted by Angela Davis on October 18, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on Betacame SP videocassettes. Actress Ruby Dee (1924 - 2014) appeared in over fifty movies, including *A Raisin In The Sun* (1961), *Uptight* (1968), *Buck And The Preacher* (1972), *Roots* (1978), *Do The Right Thing* (1989), *The Delany Sisters: The First Hundred Years* (1999) and *American Gangster* (2007), which earned her an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress in a Supporting Role.

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:

Dee, Ruby

Davis, Angela (Interviewer)

N/A (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dee, Ruby--Interviews

Dee, Ruby--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actress

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Ruby Dee, October 18, 2002. 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