

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Howard Dodson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dodson, Howard
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson,
Dates:	April 16, 2003 and April 22, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:05:26).
Abstract:	Historian and library director Howard Dodson (1939 -) is director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center and Howard University Libraries. He served as chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York from 1984 to 2011. Dodson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2003 and April 22, 2003, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_080
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian and lecturer Howard Dodson was born June 1, 1939, in Chester, Pennsylvania. After completing high school in 1957, he attended West Chester State College, where he studied social studies and English, with an emphasis on secondary education. Graduating in 1961, he went on to Villanova University where he earned an M.A. in U.S. history and political science in 1963. Currently, Dodson is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley.

Upon earning his master's degree, Dodson went to Ecuador in 1964 as part of a Peace Corps assignment where he was the director of credit union education programs for the National Credit Union Federation. In 1967, Dodson moved to Washington, D.C., and became the director of minority recruitment and deputy director of campus recruiting for the Peace Corps, where he remained for a year. Dodson became the executive director of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta in 1974, remaining there until 1979. At the same time, he taught classes at Emory University. Dodson returned to Washington, D.C., in 1979 as a consultant to the National Endowment for the Humanities. However, he remained active with the Institute of the Black World, working as a project director on a number of programs until 1984. After leaving the NEH, Dodson was hired as the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. Under his guidance and direction, the Schomburg Center sustained tremendous growth.

Dodson has been active throughout his life in a number of other projects. He was part of the Black Theology Project Conference held in Cuba, which brought Fidel Castro into the religious community for the first time in decades. He has produced a number of exhibitions and festivals celebrating black history and African American life. Dodson is also the author of several books and articles and the recipient of numerous awards, including being named to the President's Commission on the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Malcolm X Museum Award. He serves on the board of directors of the Apollo Theater Foundation and the UNESCO Slave Route Project, among many others.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Howard Dodson was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 16, 2003 and April 22, 2003, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Historian and library director Howard Dodson (1939 -) is director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center and Howard University Libraries. He served as chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, New York from 1984 to 2011.

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:

Dodson, Howard

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dodson, Howard --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Occupations:

Historian

Library Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Howard Dodson, April 16, 2003 and April 22, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual

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 Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/04/16

Howard Dodson was born on June 1, 1939, in Chester, Pennsylvania. Dodson's mother, LouBirda Jones Dodson, was born in 1915 and worked in a dry cleaning plant. His maternal grandparents lived in Danville, Virginia where they owned a tobacco farm until the stock market crash of 1929 forced them to work as sharecroppers. They were active in Schockoe Baptist Church while his great-aunt prayed twice a day in the woods and was likely a Muslim. Dodson's father, Howard Dodson, Sr., was born in Chatham, Virginia and worked as a laborer at various jobs despite having a limp due to an untreated childhood knee injury. Dodson's father's refusal to join corrupt unions cost him promotions but his self-reliance led him to make household repairs himself and hold a number of side jobs to support his family. Dodson recalls installing his childhood home's first bathroom and the family's simple meals. Dodson was an excellent student at John A. Watts Elementary School and Frederick Douglass Junior High in Chester which were segregated.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/04/16

Howard Dodson talks about his education. Dodson recalls struggling with math during junior high school but his grade improved by staying after school for tutoring. At Chester High School, Dr. Leah Jordan was such a

demanding teacher that only 9 of 89 students stayed on an academic track. Dodson remembers forming a study group which helped him to succeed. Active in Bethany Baptist Church, Dodson credits his strict parents and his participation in the Boy Scouts and men's choir with helping him stay out of trouble in his tough neighborhood. After completing high school in 1957, he attended West Chester State College in West Chester, Pennsylvania where he studied social studies and English. Dodson participated in early sit-ins in West Chester with other male athletes. He recalls the strong athletic program at West Chester College, his fellow black classmate's strong record of success, and joining Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity which introduced him to a strong network among Philadelphia area universities.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_001_003, TRT: 0:29:55 2003/04/16

Howard Dodson graduated from West Chester College in West Chester, Pennsylvania in 1961. He then attended Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania where he earned his M.A. degree in U.S. history and political science in 1963 and explored his religious beliefs. Dodson avoided being drafted to serve in the Vietnam War and instead traveled to Ecuador in 1964 as part of the Peace Corps where he was the director of credit union education programs for the National Credit Union Federation. Dodson initially lived in Quevedo, Ecuador where he recruited people to join the credit union by sponsoring parties. Given his success, Dodson was transferred to set up the credit union's regional office in Manta, Ecuador. Dodson remembers the diverse people and working with the basketball league as a coach after introducing the concept of man to man defense. In 1967, Dodson moved to Washington, D.C., and became the director of minority recruitment and deputy director of campus recruiting for the Peace Corps for a year.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_001_004, TRT: 0:29:35 2003/04/16

Howard Dodson recalls the Washington, D.C. riots and destruction that followed Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Dodson delivered supplies as a

volunteer with the relief efforts. He also worked in the press office for the Poor People's Campaign where he learned how the media frames stories in drastically different ways. After President Richard Nixon was elected, Dodson left the Peace Corps to travel across the United States and Puerto Rico. At that time, his interest in African American history was ignited and he read widely. Dodson enrolled in a new Ph.D. program, The History of Black People and Race Relations, at the University of California at Berkeley in 1969. Dodson met his wife, Carol Alexander, during course registration and the two quickly married. Dodson also met Andrew Billingsley, a Berkeley professor, who invited him to join a yearlong research fellowship at the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, Georgia, the research arm of the Martin Luther King Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_001_005, TRT: 0:30:05 2003/04/16

Howard Dodson describes the split between the Martin Luther King Center and the Institute of the Black World [IBW] after IBW's director, Gerald McWorter, now known as Abdul Alkalimat, overthrew the King Center's Board of Director's in order to make IBW an independent institution. The IBW hosted many black intellectuals, including HistoryMakers Louis Farrakhan and Joyce Ladner, and Ofield Dukes. Despite its funding difficulties, the IBW served as a black think tank providing a place for wide ranging political debates. Dodson served as IBW's Executive Director until 1979 when he moved to the National Endowment of the Humanities for three years. Dodson recalls becoming the director of the Schomburg Center rather than work on a documentary film series with Vincent Harding who later produced a series for CBS with John Henrik Clarke. Dodson met many intellectual giants at the University of California at Berkeley where he crafted an interdisciplinary curriculum to answer his questions about the black experience.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_002_006, TRT: 0:29:20 2003/04/22

Howard Dodson describes worked as a consultant at the National Endowment for the Humanities where he created

grantmanship workshops to increase the number of minorities receiving NEH awards. Dodson moved to New York City after his wife accepted an administrative position at Union Theological Seminary and applied for the job as director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Prior to being hired for that position, Dodson worked on research projects with the Council of Interracial Books for Children and the National Council of Churches. The latter project on black theology led him to travel to Cuba with HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson. In 1984, Dodson was named director of the Schomburg Center. The Schomburg Center was founded by Arthur Schomburg, a Puerto Rican of African descent who migrated to the United States in the latter part of the 19th century and collected items related to black history and culture and was a contemporary of W.E.B DuBois, Carter Woodson, and Marcus Garvey.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_002_007, TRT: 0:28:55 2003/04/22

Howard Dodson lists former directors of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. After being named director of the Schomburg Center in 1984, Dodson oversaw the renovation of the facilities, organized the collections into divisions including the manuscripts, archives, and rare books section and added the three divisions: Division of Photographs and Prints, Division of Art and Artifacts, and the Division of Moving Image and Recorded Sound. Dodson also acquired a million dollars of funding from Joseph E. Seagram and Son to build an auditorium. During his tenure as director, Dodson more than doubled the number of collections and acquired two significant collections from the Sugar Hill building in Harlem, New York and the Leon Damas collection from Brazil which contained material dealing with the negritude movement of the 1930s. Dodson also cites the success of the Schomburg Center's educational and cultural programming including tributes to Paul Robeson, Ella Fitzgerald, and Lorraine Hansberry.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_002_008, TRT: 0:28:31 2003/04/22

Howard Dodson describes the importance of highlighting

lesser known African American history. As the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, Dodson had the opportunity to discover interesting artifacts such as a set of 1936 Olympic stamps signed by Adolf Hitler. One of Dodson's major accomplishments was acquiring a collection of Malcolm X's papers which had been posted on Ebay, the online auction site, after one of his daughter's had not paid for the storage unit they had been placed in. Malcolm X's family was able to take legal action to stop the sale, and Dodson worked with the family to insure that the collection would be housed at the Schomburg Center. Dodson was also actively involved in designating the African burial ground in New York City an historical site after being appointed to a committee by HistoryMaker David Dinkins. Dodson shares his concerns that the African American community does not have a united political vision for the future.

Video Oral History Interview with Howard Dodson, Section
A2003_080_002_009, TRT: 0:09:55 2003/04/22

Howard Dodson sees his legacy as his children and his work at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Dodson wants to be remembered as a multi-faceted person who lived his life to the fullest.