

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roy Lewis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lewis, Roy, 1937-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Roy Lewis,
Dates:	December 9, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:03:20).
Abstract:	Photojournalist Roy Lewis (1937 -) is an award winning photographer. In 1975, Lewis began work on, "River Road on the Mississippi," a pictorial book focusing on the African American people, life and cultural along the Mississippi River. Lewis also published a photo book on The Million Man March, and contributed to the widely acclaimed, "Songs of My People." Lewis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 9, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_254
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Renowned photographer and activist Roy Lewis was born on July 24, 1937 in Natchez, Mississippi. He grew up on a plantation where his father worked as a sharecropper harvesting cotton. His mother died when he was five years old and he was raised by his maternal grandparents. Lewis earned his high school diploma in 1956 from Sadie V. Thompson High School where he was a member of the football team and choir.

Upon graduation, he joined relatives in Chicago and landed a job in the subscription department at Johnson Publishing. In 1960, he was drafted in the United States Army and spent time at bases in Kansas, San Antonio and Houston, Texas. While a soldier, he began to develop his talent as a photographer after purchasing his first camera for just twenty-five dollars. His career as a photographer began in 1964 when *Jet Magazine* published his photograph of musician Thelonius Monk. In 1968, Lewis left Johnson Publishing and joined the staff at Northeastern University, filming student activities. In 1970, Lewis videotaped an exclusive interview with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, which was featured in the film *A Nation of Common Sense*. In 1974, Lewis, now working as a full time freelance photographer, traveled to Zaire to film the Ali-Foreman fight. This historic video would later be featured in the Hollywood film *When We Were Kings*, a remake of the legendary championship fight. In 1975, Lewis began work on *River Road on the Mississippi*, a pictorial book focusing on the African American people, life and cultural along the Mississippi River.

In 1995, Lewis published *The Million Man March*, a book highlighting the events of that historic day. Lewis also contributed work to the widely acclaimed 1995 photo book project, *Songs of My People*.

Lewis has received numerous awards for his photojournalism including, the Maurice Sorrell Lifetime Achievement Award.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Roy Lewis was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on December 9, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photojournalist Roy Lewis (1937 -) is an award winning photographer. In 1975, Lewis began work on, "River Road on the Mississippi," a pictorial book focusing on the African American people, life and cultural along the Mississippi River. Lewis also published a photo book on The Million Man March, and contributed to the widely acclaimed, "Songs of My People."

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:

Lewis, Roy, 1937-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lewis, Roy, 1937---Interviews

Organizations:

Occupations:

Photojournalist

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 Roy Lewis, December 9, 2004. 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 (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 Roy Lewis, Section
A2004_254_001_001, TRT: 0:30:50 2004/12/09

Roy Lewis was born on July 24, 1937 on the plantation where his parents sharecropped off Highway 61 near Natchez, Mississippi. His mother, Elizabeth Saunders Lewis, was born around 1914 in Natchez, had seven children and died of tuberculosis. His father, Fritz Lewis, Jr., was born nearby in Woodville, Mississippi and sang in a quartet. Lewis moved to the black-owned Mazique plantation around 1940. After his mother's death, Lewis lived with his aunt until he joined his sisters at his maternal grandfather's home on Pine Street in Natchez. Lewis attended various elementary schools in Natchez and enjoyed geography and history, but otherwise found it difficult because his grandfather could not assist him. Lewis attended Sinai Baptist Church, received fruit at Christmas and played with BB guns and home-made scooters in the bayous around Natchez. As a young teenager, Lewis hoped to join his aunt in Chicago, Illinois. Lewis remembers his great-grandfather and a snowstorm in Mississippi several years after his birth.

Video Oral History Interview with Roy Lewis, Section
A2004_254_001_002, TRT: 0:30:53 2004/12/09

Roy Lewis completed junior high at Brumfield School in Natchez, Mississippi. After his maternal grandparents' deaths, he lived with his older siblings. He worked to support himself while attending Sadie V. Thompson High School where he sang in the choir and played football. His high school's career program placed him in a printing job at the City Bulletin. He became interested in college after a field trip to Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, but lacked the grades and funds to attend. After graduating in

1956, he joined his aunt in Chicago, Illinois. On the recommendation of his godmother, who had taught HistoryMaker John H. Johnson, Lewis was hired at Johnson Publishing Company. Lewis was initially stunned by urban life but settled into the South Side's arts community and did freelance photography for Johnson. In 1960, Lewis was drafted to the U.S. Army where his artistic interests further developed. He published work in Jet Magazine and, in 1968, assembled his 'Black and Beautiful' exhibition.

Video Oral History Interview with Roy Lewis, Section
A2004_254_001_003, TRT: 0:30:36 2004/12/09

Roy Lewis' artistic talent and photography was fostered due to the collaborative culture at Johnson Publishing Company. His 1967 exhibit, 'Black and Beautiful,' featured photographs of 1960s civil rights protests and music festivals. He taught at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, Illinois in 1968. Lewis began experimenting with cinema and obtained a first camera position at 'Black Journal.' In 1969, Lewis moved to University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana to train people in cinematography; he also interviewed Elijah Muhammad. He filmed the 1972 Wattstax benefit concert in Los Angeles, California and contributed to the 1973 documentary 'Save the Children.' He moved to Washington D.C. in 1973. In 1974, he captured the Muhammad Ali-George Forman boxing match. His photo essays have been published in Callaloo. At the time of the interview, Lewis was working on 'River Road,' a photojournalistic project about environmental hazards along the Mississippi River that he began with Tom Dent in 1976.

Video Oral History Interview with Roy Lewis, Section
A2004_254_001_004, TRT: 0:31:01 2004/12/09

Roy Lewis photographed the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C. and has published this work in books and films. Lewis talks about subjects photographed for his 'River Road' photojournalism project and explains its purpose. He talks about his contribution to 'Songs of my People: African Americans, A Self-Portrait' and his opinion of the photography collection. He describes his

photographic style, method of portraiture and favorite work. Lewis reflects upon his life, legacy and greatest artistic influences. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He also gives advice to those interested in photography and summarizes his life's work.