

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Richard Claude Steele

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Steele, Richard, 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele,
Dates:	March 22, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:07:00).
Abstract:	Radio personality Richard Claude Steele (1942 -) has worked for WJPC-FM, WVON-AM, WBMX-FM, WGCI-FM, WVAZ-FM and WBEZ-FM. Steele has also hosted “Morning Connection” for WVAZ-FM and served as a contributor to WBEZ’s talk shows and jazz programs. Steele was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_074
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chicago radio personality Richard Steele was born Richard Slaughter on January 6, 1942 in Brooklyn, New York. Raised by his parents, Charles and Sylvia Slaughter, on Chicago’s south side, Steele attended Douglas and Ruggles Elementary Schools and then Parker High School. Graduating from Hirsch High School in 1960, he later attended Loop College.

From 1960 to 1964, Steele served in the United States Air Force in Orlando, Florida. Attending the New York School of Announcing and Speech in 1964, Steele worked in a part time job at WHIB-AM in 1967. A year later, he took his first full time job in radio as the program director and an on air personality at WTOY-AM in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1970, Steele joined WAAF-AM and WLID-AM in Boston in 1970 and then moved to WGRT-FM in Chicago. A program director at WJPC-FM in 1974, he was an on air personality for WVON-AM and WBMX-FM and hosted WBEZ-FM’s *Page Two* talk show in the 1980s. For five years, Steele hosted *Morning Connection* for WVAZ-FM before getting jobs at WBEZ-FM and WGCI-FM in 1994. Steele has also hosted *Spirit Express* on WGCI-AM gospel radio. At WCIU-TV Steele was seen on *Chicago Today*, *The Discovery Showcase* and *Urban Street* with Ty Wansley. He also worked on the TV specials *Bridging the Gap* and *Two for the Show*.

At Chicago public radio station WBEZ-FM Steele hosted *Talk of the City*, interviewing people like Gwendolyn Brooks, William Safire and Wynton Marsalis. A host and contributor to WBEZ’s talk shows and jazz programs, Steele is a past president of NATRA, the black radio announcers guild, and serves as a local board member of AFTRA. He also makes frequent appearances on WTTW-TV (PBS) as a reporter for *Artbeat Chicago*. Steele is known to support the efforts of the ETA Creative Arts Foundation and other African American community organizations. He lives with his wife on Chicago’s south side.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Richard Claude Steele was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio personality Richard Claude Steele (1942 -) has worked for WJPC-FM, WVON-AM, WBMX-FM, WGCI-FM, WVAZ-FM and WBEZ-FM. Steele has also hosted “Morning Connection” for WVAZ-FM and served as a contributor to WBEZ’s talk shows and jazz programs.

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:

Steele, Richard, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Steele, Richard, 1942---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Personality

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 Richard Claude Steele, March 22, 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 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

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Richard Claude Steele was born on January 6, 1942 in Brooklyn, New York to Sylvia Gibbons Slaughter and Charles Slaughter. Steele's maternal grandmother was involved with Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Steele's mother was born in 1919 in New York City to West Indian parents. Her family included many educators, like Howard University professor Ira L.

Gibbons. As a young adult, Steele's mother enjoyed the night life in Harlem and listening to Duke Ellington and Jimmie Lunceford. She graduated from Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois and taught at various community colleges, including Loop College and Crane Junior College. Steele's father was born in 1923 in Chicago as one of seven siblings. He graduated from Du Sable High School, served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and worked for the post office. Steele describes the basement level apartment on Chicago's West Side where he spent his early childhood, and his radio documentary piece about that location years later.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Richard Claude Steele spent his childhood summers in New York City with his maternal grandparents. Steele remembers riding his bike and getting into a fight at Stephen A. Douglas Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. When Steele's family moved to the Park Manor neighborhood, he transferred to Martha M. Ruggles Elementary School, which was one of Chicago's top ten schools. While Steele found his teachers to be helpful, he struggled with the more challenging curriculum and bullying from white students. Steele sang in the choir and was an usher at Carey Temple A.M.E. Church in Chicago. After Steele's mother took him to see HistoryMaker Ramsey Lewis perform as part of the Ramsey Lewis Trio at Wilson Junior College, he became a fan of jazz and doo-wop music. Steele admired radio personalities Al Benson and Sam Evans and listened to shows like 'Stella Dallas' and 'Gunsmoke.' Steele also enjoyed watching televisions like 'Howdy Doody,' 'The Nat King Cole Show,' and 'The Ed Sullivan Show.'

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_003, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Richard Claude Steele ran track at Parker High School in Chicago, Illinois, before transferring to Emil G. Hirsch High School. Steele remembers a challenging high school English teacher. Steele sang with a group called The Belvederes, and they performed at all of his school functions. In reflecting on his family's response to the Civil Rights Movement, Steele notes his parents' main focus was on providing for the family, although they recognized the movement's importance. After graduating in 1960, Steele wanted to study communications or drama, which his mother was against. She refused to help pay for Steele's college education, so instead he enrolled in the U.S. Air Force. He joined a singing group while stationed in Orlando, Florida. After winning local talent shows, the group was offered a recording deal from HistoryMaker Berry Gordy, which they turned down. Inspired by a friend, Steele began considering a radio career. In 1967, he landed his first broadcasting job at an ethnic station in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_004, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Richard Claude Steele studied broadcasting at The New York School of Announcing and Speech in New York City. Steele also worked for Hertz-Rent-A-Car and an ethnic radio station located at the top of the Park Hyatt Hotel while searching for a full-time radio position. Although he received an offer from a radio station in Atlanta, Georgia, the position never materialized. Steele then became an on-air personality at WTOY in Roanoke, Virginia, one of the first black radio stations in the area, where he was later promoted to program director. Steele remembers his landlady's strict rules and avoiding the Ku Klux Klan in Roanoke. Even though Steele struggled to adjust to Roanoke's small-

town and Southern social customs, he developed a fan base with black residents. Steele moved to Boston, Massachusetts to be an on-air personality for WILD Radio. Disliking the hostile atmosphere in the wake of the city's riots, Steele moved back to Chicago to work at WGRT Radio.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Richard Claude Steele worked at WGRT and WVON Radio in Chicago, where radio personalities Jesse Owens and HistoryMakers Holmes "Daddy-O" Daylie and Herb Kent also had shows. During his career, Steele hosted various jazz and talk shows at WBMX, WGCI, WVAZ, and WBEZ Radio. A lifelong fan of jazz music, Steele admired jazz radio host Sid McCoy and musician Miles Davis. Among Steele's many interviews, Lena Horne and HistoryMakers Ossie Davis and Judith Jamison were his favorites. Steele also interviewed HistoryMaker Lutrelle "Lu" F. Palmer, II. During a monthly segment called Chat with the Chief, Steele talked with Chicago Mayor Harold Washington. After Washington died, Steele was asked by HistoryMaker Conrad Walter Worrill to emcee a unity rally at the UIC Pavilion, which was attended by HistoryMakers Eugene Sawyer, Gus Savage, and Reverend Jesse L. Jackson. Steele talks about the circumstances of Harold Washington's death.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_006, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Richard Claude Steele, while working for WJPC Radio, often covered HistoryMaker Holmes "Daddy-O" Daylie's jazz show when Daylie was unavailable; as one of Daylie's fans, Steele considered this a great honor. Steele worked for WBEZ Radio, a National Public Radio affiliate in Chicago, Illinois, for fifteen years. Steele also appeared on WTTW-TV in Chicago as a pledge host and contributing report for 'Artbeat Chicago.' On WCIU-TV, Steele hosted a show called 'Chicago Today' where he interviewed HistoryMakers Della Reese-Lett, Dick Gregory, and Quincy Jones. Steele also co-hosted 'An African American Salute to the Academy Awards' with Deborah Crable. Steele shares his admiration for HistoryMaker Tavis Smiley's radio show. Steele reflects upon his decision not to pursue a college degree, his career, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_001_007, TRT: 0:09:50 ?

Richard Claude Steele attributes his successful radio broadcasting career to his lifelong interest in dialog and conversing with others. To conclude the interview, Steele reflects upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_Richard_Steele_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:29:11

Richard Steele
Marv Dyson
Yvonne Daniels

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_Richard_Steele_06_MED_002, TRT: 0:48:36 ?

Richard Steele
Lena Horne

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Claude Steele, Section A2005_074_Richard_Steele_06_MED_003, TRT: 1:16:40 ?

Richard Steele

Oprah Winfrey