

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Debra Martin Chase

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Chase, Debra Martin
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase,
Dates:	March 31, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:45:25).
Abstract:	Film producer Debra Martin Chase (1956 -) served in executive positions in Denzel Washington's and Whitney Houston's production companies before forming her own company, Martin Chase Productions. Chase was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 31, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_091
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Movie producer Debra Martin Chase was born on October 11, 1956, in Great Lakes, Illinois. Chase's father, policeman Robert Douglas Martin, and her mother, teacher Beverly M. Barber Martin, moved to Pasadena, California, when Chase was six years old. Attending Copernicus Elementary School and Our Lady of Solace School in Chicago, and Washington School and Loma Alta School in Alhambra, California, Chase graduated from Amherst High School in 1973. Chase earned her B.A. degree from Mount Holyoke College in 1977, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1981.

Chase practiced law at Houston's Mearday, Day, and Caldwell firm, and wrote freelance articles for *Houston City* magazine. After serving as a lawyer for Tenneco from 1983 to 1985, Chase moved to New York City where she worked for Stroock, Stroock, and Lavan law firm, and eventually became in-house counsel for Avon Products. In 1988, Chase worked for the Michael Dukakis presidential campaign and David Dinkins's successful mayoral campaign.

Interested in the film industry, Chase joined the legal department of Columbia Pictures, and by 1989, she was executive assistant to Frank Price. By 1992, Chase was heading Denzel Washington's production company, Mundy Lane Entertainment, producing *The Pelican Brief*, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *The Preacher's Wife*, *Courage Under Fire* and the Academy Award nominated documentary, *Hank Aaron: Chasing the Dream*. By 1995, Chase had become the executive vice president of Whitney Houston's Brown House Productions, which produced the 1997 Emmy nominated television musical *Rogers and Hammerstein's Cinderella*, and *The Princess Diaries*. In 2000, Chase formed Martin Chase Productions; she went on to produce Fox-TV's *Missing* and Disney's *The Cheetah Girls*, *Miracle* (2004), and *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005).

Chase volunteered for Friends of the Studio Museum of Harlem; the Heartland Film Festival; the Community Resource Advisory Committee of the Los Angeles County Museum; and served on the board of Chicago's

Columbia College. A producing mentor for the University of Southern California, Chase remained a resident of the Hollywood Hills.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Debra Martin Chase was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 31, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Film producer Debra Martin Chase (1956 -) served in executive positions in Denzel Washington's and Whitney Houston's production companies before forming her own company, Martin Chase Productions.

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:

Chase, Debra Martin

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Chase, Debra Martin--Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews

African American television producers and directors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Film Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Debra Martin Chase, March 31, 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 Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_001, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

Debra Martin Chase was born October 11, 1956 at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Great Lakes, Illinois. Her mother, Beverly Barber Martin, was born in 1936 in Chicago, Illinois. She was a professor at City Colleges of Chicago, and her mother, HistoryMaker Irma Josephine Barber, was from New Orleans, Louisiana. Her father was a Pullman porter who loved opera, was very cultured and died early in her life. Chase was close to her maternal grandmother and lived in her house in Englewood until she was six. Chase's father, Robert Martin, was born in 1934 in Chicago. His mother was a Christian Scientist from Cleveland, Ohio. Martin was a U.S. Marine and an officer in the Chicago Police Department. He retired as a police sergeant in California. At six, Chase's family moved to Pasadena, California where the community was more integrated. She attended Washington Elementary School in Pasadena and then the majority-white Loma Alta Elementary School in Altadena, California where she was in the gifted program.

African American women executives--Interviews.

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_002, TRT: 0:29:52 ?

Debra Martin Chase was an imaginative child who won a prize in a writing contest, enjoyed reading and often watched classic movies. She especially loved 'Mary Poppins,' and even wrote to Walt Disney for advice on becoming a movie star; despite this interest, Chase did not consider a career in film since the industry was unfamiliar to her. She played viola and wanted to learn the flute as well, but a racist teacher discouraged her. Although she was raised Catholic, Chase left the Church after her confirmation. As a teenager, she moved to Amherst, Massachusetts while her mother pursued a master's degree at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Chase disliked her new home and spent most of her time reading. Despite being a straight A student, her guidance counselor did not recommend Ivy League schools to her. She spent a summer living with her grandmother, HistoryMaker Irma Joseph Barber, in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from Amherst High School at sixteen, she entered Mount Holyoke College.

Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_003, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Debra Martin Chase majored in political science with a minor in English at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. During college, she interned with Newsweek and at HistoryMaker The Honorable Edward Brooke's office in Washington, D.C. While deciding whether to pursue a career in journalism or law, Chase moved to Los Angeles, California and worked as a paralegal for O'Melveny & Myers. Though she did not enjoy her time as a paralegal, the law offered greater financial security than journalism, so Chase enrolled in Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1970. At law school, she met her future husband, HistoryMaker Anthony Ray Chase, son of HistoryMaker John Chase. After settling with her husband in Houston, Texas, Chase worked at numerous law firms before taking a year off to work as a freelance writer for Houston City Magazine. In 1983, she joined Tenneco as an in-house lawyer, then in 1985, moved to New York, New York and worked for

Stroock & Stroock & Lavan.

Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_004, TRT: 0:28:06 ?

Debra Martin Chase worked as a lawyer for Avon Products in New York, New York. After working on Michael Dukakis' presidential campaign, she decided to pursue her childhood dream of filmmaking. While meeting with the general counsel of Columbia Pictures in Culver City, California, Chase learned of an internship program that trained studio executives. After completing this internship, Chase began working as a lawyer for Columbia. She met studio executive Frank Price and began working as his executive assistant. When he was replaced by Mark Canton, as part of his contract, he made Chase director of creative affairs. A chance meeting with Denzel Washington led to Chase becoming the manager of his company, Mundy Lane Productions, in 1992. Chase helped produce the documentary 'Hank Aaron: Chasing the Dream.' Knowing how much he achieved in the face of violent threats, Chase was eager to share Aaron's story with the public. While working on 'The Preacher's Wife' with Mundy Lane Productions, she met Whitney Houston.

Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_005, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Debra Martin Chase became the manager of Whitney Houston's Brownhouse Productions and produced the 1997 multicultural TV movie remake of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Cinderella.' Chase also produced 'The Princess Diaries,' which featured Julie Andrews, the star of her favorite childhood movie, 'Mary Poppins.' Having mentored television producer and writer Shonda Rhimes at Mundy Lane Productions, Chase recommended her as the writer for 'The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement.' After forming Martin Chase Productions in 2000, Chase produced the movies 'The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants' and 'The Cheetah Girls.' Through these productions, Chase hoped to present empowering images for young girls and feature multicultural casts. Chase talks about the challenges facing African Americans in the film industry, her impression of HistoryMaker The Honorable Barack Obama and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Debra Martin Chase, Section A2005_091_001_006, TRT: 0:20:22 ?

Debra Martin Chase tried to produce a film about Dorothy Dandridge, based on HistoryMaker Donald Bogle's book and starring Halle Berry. She was met with resistance from multiple studios because she wanted the movie to be a major release in theaters. Being unable to produce this movie was the greatest disappointment of her career. Chase has had to face many challenges as an African American woman movie producer; even her success as the first African American woman to have her own production company within a major studio does not guarantee her security within the highly competitive movie business. Despite this, Chase enjoys seeing the end result of her production work and knowing the impact that the movie has upon the audience. Chase talks about her parents' reactions to her accomplishments as a movie producer. She reflects upon her life, legacy, and her aspirations to write a novel and live in Italy. Chase concludes by narrating her photographs.