

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Willis Bing Davis

PERSON

**Davis, Willis Bing**

**Alternative Names:** Willis Bing Davis; Bing Davis; Willis Hoke Davis

**Life Dates:** June 30, 1937-

**Place of Birth:** Greer, South Carolina, USA

**Residence:** Dayton, OH

**Work:** Dayton, OH

**Occupations:** Mixed Media Artist

## Biographical Note

Cultural leader Willis “Bing” Davis was born on June 30, 1937, in Greer, South Carolina to Verona Hargro Davis Buffington and Levonia “Lee” Davis, a coal truck driver and gospel singer. Growing up on Dayton, Ohio’s, East Side, Davis attended Washington Elementary School. An All-City basketball player at six feet four inches tall, Davis graduated from Wilbur Wright High School in 1955. Assisted by coach Dean Dooley, Davis entered DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, where his classmate was Vernon Jordan. Graduating in 1959, Davis taught art at Dayton’s Colonel White High School. He attended the Dayton Art Institute and earned his Master of Education degree from Oxford, Ohio’s, Miami University in 1967. Later, from 1975 to 1976, he pursued graduate studies at Indiana University.

Returning to DePauw University in 1970, Davis served as assistant dean of art and coordinator of Black Studies – as the only black faculty member. In 1973, Davis attended his first meeting of the National Conference of Artists (NCA) and made his first trip to Africa (Ghana). Davis was appointed assistant dean of the graduate school and associate professor of art at Miami University in 1976. That same year, Davis held his first one man show at the Studio Museum of Harlem. In 1978, Davis was invited to chair the Art Department and to become director of the new Paul Robeson Cultural and Performing Arts Center by Dr. Arthur E. Thomas of Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. Davis, who served on Central State University’s faculty for twenty years, also was a visiting scholar at the University of Dayton and an artist in residence at Wright State University.

Davis has an illustrious record as an artist and curator including exhibitions at the

American Craft Museum, the Renwick Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art and Design, Savannah College of Art and Design, Anacotia Museum, National Museum of Art of Senegal, West Africa, United States Embassy Accra, Ghana, and Museum fur Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany. Davis was visiting artist-lecturer for Panafest 94 in Accra, Ghana. In 1997, Davis received the Ohio Art Educator of the Year Award. He received the 1999 Global Youth Peace and Tolerance Award and the 2001 Ohioan Pegasus Award. Davis is president of the board of directors of the National Conference of Artists. Davis also established EbonNia Gallery in the developing Wright/Dunbar neighborhood of Dayton's West Side.

A hometown cultural hero, Davis has a grown daughter and lives in Dayton with his wife, Audrey.

## Related Entries

**Wilbur Wright High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Washington Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]