

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George White

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	White, George (George Gregory)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George White,
Dates:	April 1, 2006 and March 28, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:02:13).
Abstract:	Newspaper reporter George White (1953 -) was honored twice with the Pulitzer Prize while working as a journalist for the L.A. Times. White is also assistant director of UCLA's Center for Communications and Community. White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 1, 2006 and March 28, 2006, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_054
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist George Gregory White was born on December 3, 1953, in Detroit, Michigan, to Edna and George Bernard White. White was an accomplished student, and his teachers observed his journalistic skills at an early age. He received a scholarship to attend Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, where he graduated with honors with his B.S. degree in journalism and history in 1975. He eventually obtained his M.A. degree in African history in 1981, also from Michigan State University.

White's first job was at the Minneapolis Tribune from 1975 to 1979. After obtaining his M.A. degree, White worked as a regional correspondent with the Detroit Bureau of *U.S. News & World Report* from 1982 to 1984. In 1984, White began working for the *Detroit Free Press* as a reporter and columnist. In 1988, White applied and began working as a reporter and special projects editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, where he would remain until 1999.

While working for the *Los Angeles Times*, White's profile rose considerably in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. White received a Pulitzer Prize alongside the rest of the *L.A. Times* team for their coverage. White was honored with an "Outstanding Dedication" citation from the Los Angeles Press Club. In 1994, White was again the recipient of a Pulitzer for his reporting on the Northridge, California Earthquake of that year. In 1995, White also profiled sweatshop slavery in El Monte, California.

From 1992 to 1994, White served as chairman of the Unity Media Access Project, a media education program in Southern California that was cosponsored by the Black Journalists Association of Southern California, the California Chicano News Media Association and the Los Angeles Chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association. In 1993, White received a Unity Award from the Black Journalists Association for his work in the field of community outreach. White has served on the diversity committee and the international news committee of American Society of Newspaper Editors, and was co-chair of the Committee on Diversity at the *Los Angeles Times*

from 1992 to 1994. White is assistant director of UCLA's Center for Communications and Community. He is also the editor of *Context*, a journal on media and communities, as well as C3 Online, which reports on communications and community development.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George White was conducted by Paul Brock on April 1, 2006 and March 28, 2006, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper reporter George White (1953 -) was honored twice with the Pulitzer Prize while working as a journalist for the L.A. Times. White is also assistant director of UCLA's Center for Communications and Community.

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:

White, George (George Gregory)

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

White, George (George Gregory)--Interviews

African American journalists--California--Los Angeles--Interviews

African American editors--Interviews

Periodical editors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Los Angeles Times (Firm)

Occupations:

Newspaper Reporter

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 George White, April 1, 2006 and March 28, 2006. 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 George White, Section A2006_054_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

George White was born on December 3, 1953 in Detroit, Michigan to Edna Finney White and George White. His paternal grandfather owned and operated a ninety-acre farm with the help of his children, the youngest of whom was White's father. White's mother was the daughter of sharecroppers. She was born in Georgia and met White's father after moving to Rutherford County, North Carolina as a child. White's father took on the middle name Bernard after George Bernard Shaw, and attended Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina along with his brothers. Many of his siblings moved to Detroit to work in the auto industry during World War II, and one served in the war under General George Patton. In 1959, White's parents moved to the Jeffries Housing Projects in Detroit. They later moved to a Jewish neighborhood in northwest Detroit, where White attended Schulze Elementary School and was the oldest of his five siblings. His mother worked in the laundry room at the hospital.

African American journalists--California--Los Angeles--Interviews.

African American editors--Interviews.

Periodical editors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

George White was one of few African Americans at Detroit's Schulze Elementary School. His parents bought a home in a more affluent Jewish neighborhood with his father's income from Chrysler Corporation. White became interested in politics after seeing civil rights marches on television. He remembers his mother crying after President John Kennedy's assassination and his father's distrust of Democrats. After graduating from Beaubien Junior High School, White was accepted to Cass Technical High School to study commercial art. Discouraged by his classmates' art, he transferred to Samuel C. Mumford High School, where alumni include filmmaker Jerry Bruckheimer. White joined the school newspaper and literary journal. Upset by the lack of African American studies classes, White organized a student protest that shut down the school for three days. In his first black history class, he learned about African empires and resolved to study African history. White was encouraged to perform poetry at his graduation in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_001_003, TRT: 0:27:21 ?

George White opted to attend Michigan State University, where other alumni of Samuel C. Mumford High School helped him become director of the Office of Black Affairs. White became a writer for the school newspaper, the State News, when it came under the scrutiny of Robert Green for its lack of black staff. He was the sole African American and the only freshman writer, and earned an internship with the Detroit Free Press the summer after his sophomore year. After an editor advised him to major in something other than journalism, White transferred to the Honors College to earn a second major in African Studies. White left the State News his junior year to edit at the Grapevine Journal, the school's African American publication. As a member of the student advisory board, White counseled university president Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. during a student protest of the Vietnam War. White interned with The New York Times and The Washington Post, then joined the staff of the Minneapolis Tribune.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

George White was one of few African Americans at The New York Times, where he met Leon DeCosta Dash and Milton Coleman. During his internship with The Washington Post, he worked under Courtland Milloy, Elizabeth Becker and Hal Logan at the King George's County bureau. After graduating from Michigan State University, White joined a minority internship program at Minneapolis' Star Tribune, and was quickly promoted to staff. For four years, he covered topics like urban environments, government contracts, and Native American affairs. While covering a story on a rebellion at the Red Lake Reservation, he narrowly escaped being shot, but was granted the only interview with the leader of the rebellion. White graduated from Michigan State University with a master's degree in 1981. He worked briefly for U.S. News and World Report magazine's Detroit bureau. In 1982, in order to write more standalone stories, he became a business reporter for the Detroit Free Press, and reluctantly covered the automobile industry.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_001_005, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

George White wrote about the utilities industry for the Detroit Free Press and covered the acquisition of the American Natural Resources Company. He focused on stories about the problems of nuclear energy and corruption. While in Pasadena, California to watch Michigan State University play in the 1988 Rose Bowl, White was introduced to a writer at the Los Angeles Times. He interviewed and joined the staff as a business reporter. White covered the Lockheed Corporation takeover battle, and wrote extensively about anti-apartheid protesters who pressured three Detroit companies to divest from South Africa. He soon opted to focus on international trade and foreign investment. Although Otis Chandler's management had improved the Los Angeles Times' diversity, White was the only journalist of color at the downtown headquarters. He recalls how journalists of color were sent into the streets to cover the Los Angeles Riots but were not given due credit in the paper.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_001_006, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

George White refused to recruit journalists of color to Minneapolis Tribune's poorly-run minority internship program and raised his concerns with Vernon Jarrett at the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) convention. Following the Los Angeles Times' poor handling of the Los Angeles riots in 1992, White decided to use his knowledge of corporate diversity programs to form a diversity committee for the newspaper. He chaired the UNITY Media Access Project, in which representatives from NABJ, the Asian American Journalists Association and the California Chicano News Media Association trained minority journalists. White was assigned to cover retail in 1996, during an era when corporate strategy focused on acquisition of smaller businesses. White covered the investigation of the Carole Little murders, and shares the police theory that the Russian mafia was responsible. White developed a relationship with the state labor department's deputy director, who provided the lead for his next big story.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_002_007, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

George White was notified by the deputy commissioner of the state labor department of a possible slave ring in California. In the wake of its mishandling of the Waco, Texas intervention, the federal government opted out of participating in the raid. Authorities discovered about seventy people from Thailand forced to work in clothing factories. White covered the raid and exposed the modern day enslavement of garment workers in the Los Angeles Times. His story received national attention. In response, President William

Jefferson “Bill” Clinton created a White House task force on sweatshops; apparel and retail industries adopted new codes of conduct; and the Smithsonian Institute featured an exhibit on American sweatshops. Reflecting upon the impact of this story, White considered it among the most important work of his career. Following the El Monte slave ring story, he became a self-employed media consultant.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_002_008, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

George White created a booklet for the Ford Foundation on economic development in minority communities. He also created seminars for journalists through the Foundation for American Communications. As a fellow at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, he helped to develop a program to allow journalists to do special reports on social justice issues. For the anniversary of Rodney King’s death in 2001, White organized a forum on police reform, economic development and media coverage. He became the assistant director of the University of California’s Center for Communications and Community, which, in partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, helped nonprofit and community organizations benefit from media coverage. When gang violence spread in Los Angeles in 2003, White hosted a forum that explored the problem as a matter of public health. Upon an audit of media coverage in Hartford, Connecticut, White discovered racial disparities in sourcing.

Video Oral History Interview with George White, Section A2006_054_002_009, TRT: 0:09:50 ?

George White describes how a new community media outlet was created in Hartford, Connecticut through the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Making Change initiative. The initiative followed an audit that found media in Hartford vastly underused sources of color in their reporting. The new outlet included a website, television show and a newsletter. Its reporting and production staff were recruited from the African American community of Upper Albany and the Latino community of Frog Hollow, which were adjacent to one another in Hartford. White talks about the rise of community-based media in the age of the Internet, recalling how bloggers forced U.S. Senate majority leader Trent Lott to resign following racist comments. The University of California Los Angeles Center for Communications and Community was featured in Nonprofit Quarterly as a leading expert in media-community relations. White reflects upon his life and talks about his role model, Vernon Jarrett.