

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charlayne Hunter-Gault

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 15, 2006 and June 17, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:08:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper reporter, television news correspondent, and civic activist Charlayne Hunter-Gault (1942 - ) won admittance to the segregated University of Georgia in 1961. She has reported for 'The New York Times', PBS's 'McNeil-Lehrer Newshour', NPR, and CNN, for whom she is the Johannesburg, South Africa bureau chief. Hunter-Gault was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 15, 2006 and June 17, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_092
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Award-winning journalist, author, and school desegregation pioneer Charlayne Hunter-Gault was born on February 27, 1942, in Due West, South Carolina, to Charles and Althea Hunter. Because her father, a chaplain in the United States Army, was often re-assigned, Hunter-Gault and her siblings attended schools in California, Indiana, Ohio, Georgia and Alaska. Hunter-Gault graduated third in her class from Atlanta's Henry McNeal Turner High School in 1960. Backed by a

group of black businessmen and accompanied by fellow student Hamilton Holmes, Hunter-Gault applied for admission to the segregated University of Georgia. Initially denied admittance, she enrolled at Wayne State University in Detroit, but Constance Baker Motley of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and a group of Atlanta lawyers won her admittance to the University of Georgia in January of 1961. Hunter-Gault transcended the expected racial hostility, served a summer internship with the *Louisville Times* and graduated with her B.A. degree in journalism in 1963.

That same year, Hunter-Gault accepted a job as an editorial assistant with the *New Yorker* magazine. She won a Russell Sage Fellowship for a year and then served as a reporter and evening anchor for WRC-TV in Washington, D.C. She returned to print journalism by accepting a post with the *New York Times* in 1968, establishing the newspaper's Harlem bureau. In 1978, Hunter-Gault joined PBS's *McNeil-Lehrer Newshour* where she served as national correspondent and filled in as an anchor. She joined NPR in 1997 as chief correspondent in Africa. In 1999, Hunter-Gault became the Johannesburg, South Africa bureau chief for CNN.

Hunter-Gault has received numerous awards for journalism including two National News and Documentary Emmy Awards and two George Foster Peabody Awards. She has been recognized by the National Urban Coalition and the American Women in Radio and Television. Named Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists, Hunter-Gault has written articles for *Essence*, *Ms.*, *Life*, and *Saturday Review*. Her courage as a pioneer integrationist has been chronicled by Calvin Trillen and recognized by the University of Georgia, where a hall is named for her and fellow student Hamilton Holmes. Her autobiography, *In My Place*, was published in 1992. Hunter-Gault's exploration of modern Africa, entitled *New News out of Africa: Uncovering Africa's Renaissance*, was published in 2006.

Hunter-Gault is the mother of a grown son and daughter and currently lives in South Africa with her husband, banker Ron Gault.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 15, 2006 and June 17, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper reporter, television news correspondent, and civic activist Charlayne Hunter-Gault (1942 - ) won admittance to the segregated University of Georgia in 1961. She has reported for

'The New York Times', PBS's 'McNeil-Lehrer Newshour', NPR, and CNN, for whom she is the Johannesburg, South Africa bureau chief.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Hunter-Gault, Charlayne

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Hunter-Gault, Charlayne--Interviews

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African American women civil rights workers--Interviews

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African American television journalists--Interviews

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Women television journalists--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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New York Times Company.

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Cable News Network.

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## **Occupations:**

Newspaper Reporter

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Television News Correspondent

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Civic Activist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers|CivicMakers

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## **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 Charlayne Hunter-Gault, June 15, 2006 and June 17, 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 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).

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## **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.

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## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

### **Series I: Original Interview Footage**

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:58 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault was born on February 27, 1942 in Due West, South Carolina to Althea Brown Hunter and Charles Hunter, Jr. Her mother's parents were both children of white men. Her mother's paternal grandfather

was an unmarried aristocrat in Covington, Georgia known for his relationships with African American women. Hunter-Gault believes her maternal great-grandmother was thrown out of her slaveowner's home after her pregnancy was discovered. Hunter-Gault's father attended elementary school with his mother, who returned to school as an adult to demonstrate the value of education. A devout woman, she taught Hunter-Gault psalms and inspired her religious beliefs. Hunter-Gault's paternal grandfather was an African Methodist Episcopal presiding elder who taught others to preach, including her father before he became a U.S. Army officer during World War II. Movies, comics, and playing outside at her paternal grandparents' home in Florida inspired Hunter-Gault's lifelong fascination with Africa.

African American women civil rights workers--  
Interviews.

African American television journalists--Interviews.

Women television journalists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section  
A2006\_092\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault's mother attended Hyde Park High School in Chicago, Illinois where a young Nat King Cole performed at school dances. Her father, a graduate of Clark College and Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, met her mother at a church function in Covington, Georgia. He eventually became a U.S. Army chaplain. Her mother, who passed for white, shopped at Rich's department store. When they moved from Covington to Atlanta, Hunter-Gault attended E.R. Carter Elementary School. Traveling with her grandmother on segregated trains to visit relatives in New York City introduced Hunter-Gault to urban life and inspired her first published story. Upon moving to Mozley Park, a recently integrated neighborhood, she transferred to Frank L. Stanton Elementary School. After entering Henry McNeal Turner High School, her family left Atlanta to join her father on a U.S. military base near Anchorage, a pioneer town in Alaska Territory, where Hunter-Gault spent her time babysitting and playing piano.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section  
A2006\_092\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:06 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault spent a year in Anchorage, Alaska Territory and was the only black student at the military base high school. Having never lived together for any extended length of time, her parents divorced after nine months. Hunter-Gault returned to Atlanta and attended the all-black Henry McNeal Turner High School where the teachers encouraged her interest in journalism and she became the youngest editor of the school newspaper, took challenging courses and joined many extracurricular activities, including traveling with the football team as halftime announcer. She graduated third in her class and was voted class queen. During her senior year, Hunter-Gault was asked by the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action to help integrate Georgia State University, but class valedictorian Hamilton Holmes suggested they enroll at University of Georgia, a superior university in Athens, instead. After entering Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, Hunter-Gault transferred to University of Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section  
A2006\_092\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:24 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault pledged Delta Sigma Theta while enrolled at Wayne State University and awaiting the court's decision on her admittance to the University of Georgia. In December 1960, Judge William Augustus Bootle ordered Hunter-Gault's admission. After hearing the news from a reporter, she returned to Georgia. HistoryMaker Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. drove her and Hamilton Holmes to campus. That same day, Bootle stayed the order, but lawyers Donald Hollowell and Constance Baker Motley had it overturned by Judge Elbert Parr Tuttle. On her second night, a riot broke out and a brick was thrown into her dorm room. Eventually, state patrolmen dispersed the mob with tear gas. Hunter-Gault was suspended and removed from the dormitory as students harassed her. Officers escorted her and Holmes back to Atlanta, Georgia, where Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action members convened at her home. After Motley and Hollowell won their argument against the

suspension, Hunter-Gault returned to the University of Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:27 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault, barred from facilities like the cafeteria and swimming pool, experienced stress-related stomach pain due to the hostile environment at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Unlike honor student Hamilton Holmes, Hunter-Gault was on academic probation for her poor science grades. However, her creativity and writing skills impressed her peers and dampened their antagonism. Despite facing discrimination, she befriended the professors who supported her admission as well as fellow journalism students, including Walter Stovall, her future husband. After graduation, they married and moved to New York City in 1962. The media excoriated Hunter-Gault's interracial relationship, and some went so far as falsifying condemnatory statements from Stovall's father. Hunter-Gault talks about her relationship with Holmes, who became head of Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, and the impact of his death in 1995. She reflects upon the courage of her generation in their fight for civil rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_001\_006, TRT: 0:26:56 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault studied at the Henry W. Grady School of Journalism, home to the prestigious Peabody Award committee, as a student at the University of Georgia. She obtained an editorial assistantship at The New Yorker in 1963 through journalist Calvin Trillin, whom she had met while he was writing a book on the integration of the University of Georgia. Editor William Shawn helped Hunter-Gault develop her writing as she published freelance pieces in the magazine. Eventually, she was promoted to Talk of The Town writer. After her divorce from Stovall, Hunter-Gault accepted a fellowship at Washington University of St. Louis in Missouri but was unsatisfied with academia in the wake of the riots following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom she had met in Atlanta. She took a position with NBC in Washington, D.C. to cover social

issues in an effort to bridge the nation's racial divide. After meeting her second husband, HistoryMaker Ronald T. Gault, the two moved to New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_001\_007, TRT: 0:28:38 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault joined The New York Times, even though the white editors who interviewed her believed black journalists were biased. She established the first internal bureau of The New York Times in Harlem and served as its chief. Convincing a reluctant Black Panther to let her report on the Party's meeting taught her about approaching journalistic sources. In 1969, she published her first front-page story, which covered the drug-related death of twelve year old Walter Vandermeer. That year, Hunter-Gault convinced The Times to use black rather than Negro as the standard term for African Americans after a copy-editor changed her article about the Black Women's Community Development Foundation. She obtained permission to cover SNCC activist Ralph Featherstone's funeral although it was closed to journalists. In 1979, she became a reporter for 'The MacNeil/Lehrer Report.' While reporting in Africa, she was mistaken for white. She also explains why she prefers being in the field to being a news anchor.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_001\_008, TRT: 0:26:16 2006/06/15

Charlayne Hunter-Gault worked at The New York Times when its employees filed class action lawsuits against the newspaper for race and gender-based employment discrimination in the late 1970s. Although she was not involved in the lawsuits, Hunter-Gault fought racism at the Times in other ways, such as by having the first African American engagement announcement published. At 'The MacNeil/Lehrer Report,' Hunter-Gault worked first as a substitute anchor then a field reporter. She traveled abroad to interview Shimon Peres and Hosni Mubarak, who helped her obtain an interview with the elusive Hafez al-Assad of Syria. In 1985, Hunter-Gault covered South African apartheid in 'Apartheid's People,' a five-part series for which she received a Peabody Award. Interviewing Nelson Mandela upon his release from prison

and again upon his presidential inauguration led to a close working relationship with him despite his tendency to be guarded from reporters. Hunter-Gault has two children, Suesan Stovall and Chuma Gault.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_002\_009, TRT: 0:29:49 2006/06/17

Charlene Hunter-Gault created 'Apartheid's People' during the mid-1980s as a five-part series for PBS' 'The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour.' While most news covered South African apartheid in reductive terms, Hunter-Gault wanted to document Afrikaners' perspectives as well as the complexities of black South Africans' lives. She interviewed an Afrikaner member of the Cooperative Winegrowers' Association during a barbecue at his home; Cyril Ramaphosa, the newly appointed head of the National Union of Mineworkers; a young victim of South African Police brutality; and Thabo Mbeki during his exile in Lusaka, Zambia. During another interview, Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam famously told Hunter-Gault that he would not hurt a fly. She talks about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the treatment of African leaders accused of crimes against humanity. Hunter-Gault later worked for CNN and NPR, and remarks that she found greater latitude to tell in-depth stories in public broadcasting.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_002\_010, TRT: 0:30:15 2006/06/17

Charlayne Hunter-Gault received a Peabody Award for her coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in 1997. Since then, her journalism in Africa focused on HIV, poverty, and other issues affecting women and children. She reported on Zimbabwe's political situation, despite its suppression of journalism, under the guise of covering the 2003 ICC Cricket World Cup. Hunter-Gault was briefly detained there in 2005. She comments on Robert Mugabe's violent and oppressive rule of Zimbabwe, where, despite improvements in education, many people lack food or means to farm. Hunter-Gault's coverage of Africa received little attention from the African American community until she received an honorary degree from Dillard University in New Orleans,

Louisiana alongside Ray Charles and Dr. David Satcher. Her latest work documents the African continent's political and cultural renaissance. She also collaborated with Queen Rania al Abdullah of Jordan on a global initiative to alleviate maternal and infant mortality.

Video Oral History Interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Section A2006\_092\_002\_011, TRT: 0:18:41 2006/06/17

Charlayne Hunter-Gault describes her hopes and concerns for the African American and African communities. She talks about her grandparents' impact on her life, as well as her son, Chuma Hunter-Gault; her daughter, Suesan Stovall; and her husband, HistoryMaker Ronald T. Gault. Hunter-Gault concludes her interview by reflecting upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered.