

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leonard Davis

PERSON

Davis, Leonard, 1953-

Alternative Names: Leonard Davis;

Life Dates: March 12, 1953-

Place of Birth: Washington, District of Columbia,
USA

Residence: New York, NY

Occupations: Fashion Designer

Biographical Note

Fashion designer, fashion event producer and Black Americana collector, Leonard Davis, was born on March 12, 1953 in Washington, D.C. to Jordan and Cleo Davis. He graduated from Coolidge High School in 1970 and earned his associate degree in applied science at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York in 1973. Davis then continued his education at the world famous L'Ecole de la Chamber Syndicale De La Couture Parisienne in Paris, France where he

earned his “Couture Design” certificate in 1975. After working as an apprentice for Jean-Louis Sherrer in Paris, Davis returned to New York and began his designing career working for Willi Wear. On more than one occasion throughout his career, Davis was the first African American designer to head a division for companies including Adrianna Papell, Josephine Chaus, Inc. and Donnkenny. For twelve years, Davis worked developing private label products at Liz Claiborne, QVC, The Home Shopping Network (HSN), Essence by Mail and retail stores including Saks, Nordstrom, Bloomingdale's, Macy's, JC Penney, Sears, Ashley Stewart and Steinmart. Davis has also worked abroad as Design Director for several International fashion houses including Mihang International, (Korean) Sage Apparel, (India) Tanzara/Plus Impact, (India). In 1990, Davis realized the necessity for an annual event to honor African Americans in the fashion industry. With the collaboration of The Fashion Institute of Technology and Fashion and Arts Xchange, Davis' vision was realized. He produced several annual events which honored black fashion pioneers including Ophelia DeVore, Naomi Sims, Andre-Leon Talley, Iman, Geoffrey Holder, Carmen De Lavallade, Wesley Tann, Helen Williams, Audrey Smaltz, Susan Taylor and Stephan Burrows. The event was hosted by Diahann Carroll and Phylicia Rashad.

In 1985, Davis began collecting Black Americana. He has published two books entitled “Black Americana Price Guide.” Davis has appeared in numerous magazines and newspaper articles, and The Davis Collection has been featured on several television shows including “Antiques Road Show,” “Treasures in Your Home,” ABC News, and featured in Spike Lee movie “Bamboozled.” Leonard Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 31, 2007.

Related Entries

Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Calvin Coolidge Senior High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Fashion Institute of Technology [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale Couture Parisienne
[STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Tanzara [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Fashion Designer

[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Willi Smith [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1978 to ?]

Fashion Designer

Adrianna Papell [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1985]

Fashion Designer

Chaus [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1985 to ?]

Head Designer

Fashion Outreach [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Fashion & Art Exchange [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Boardmember