

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Daniels, George, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels,
Dates:	April 23, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:47:47).
Abstract:	Record store owner George Daniels (1946 -) owned Chicago's famous George's Music Room. He also created and headed the National United Independent Retailers, an organization dedicated to preserving African American-owned independent retailers. Daniels was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_156
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Record store owner George Xavier Daniels was born on December 18, 1946 in the Bronx, New York to Elvina and George Daniels, who were restaurant owners. After his parents separated, Daniels was sent to live with relatives in Texas. Having a hard time adjusting to the racist South, Daniels did, however, seem to develop an affinity for southern music. When he moved to Chicago, Illinois to live with his father and half-brother before high school, he became attracted to Chicago's blues and early rock scene. In high school, Daniels played the trumpet. He graduated from Luke Junior College in Chicago, which he attended to avoid being drafted into the Vietnam War.

After working for a short time at a steel mill, Daniels took a job as a janitor at legendary Chess Records in Chicago. There, he met and heard artists like Muddy Waters, Etta James, The Dells and Ramsey Lewis among many others. At the same time, Daniels watched the independent music industry achieve some of its greatest successes. He then was hired at a black-owned record store wholesaler on Chicago's Michigan Avenue. In 1968, Daniels started managing one of the wholesale record stores, and in 1969, Daniels assumed ownership of the store, renaming it George's Music Room.

For the first three years, Daniels was the only employee and worked sixteen hours a day. Overcoming bankruptcy and evictions, Daniels's biggest problems have come from the modernization of the music industry. Daniels created and headed the National United Independent Retailers, an organization dedicated to preserving African American-owned independent retailers.

Daniels' business has continually adapted. He has maintained his popularity in the community with artists' store visits. These artists have included Mary J. Blige, LL Cool J, Al Green, R. Kelly, Alicia Keys, and The Temptations. George's Music Room was singled out by Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley as a quintessential Chicago store and offered a space to open a branch at Midway Airport, which Daniels has operated successfully ever since.

Daniels was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 23, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Daniels was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 23, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Record store owner George Daniels (1946 -) owned Chicago's famous George's Music Room. He also created and headed the National United Independent Retailers, an organization dedicated to preserving African American-owned independent retailers.

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:

Daniels, George, 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Daniels, George, 1946- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Record Store Owner

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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 Daniels, April 23, 2007. 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 Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

George Daniels was born on December 18, 1946 in New York City to Elvina Guillory Daniels and George Daniels, Sr. Daniels' maternal family descended from a French fur trader who migrated to Canada in 1632, and settled in Louisiana. He married an enslaved woman, who convinced him to sign a contract guaranteeing their children's freedom. Many years later, Daniels'

maternal grandmother, Alice Harmon Guillory, owned a café in Houston, Texas; and his maternal grandfather, Raymond Guillory, Sr., worked at the Port of Houston. They had ten children, including Daniels' mother, who married her first husband and raised Daniels' three half-siblings in Washington State. Daniels' father was orphaned at the age of eight years old, and was working in the oil fields of Houston when he met Daniels' mother. He moved to New York City to work as a welder, and Daniels' mother later joined him. Together, they opened the Daniels Restaurant, which became so successful that they opened nine other locations in the New York area.

Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_002, TRT: 0:28:54 ?

George Daniels grew up in the Flushing neighborhood of Queens, New York, where he attended P.S. 154, and lived across the hall from Billie Holliday. After his parents divorced in 1957, he and his mother, Elvina Guillory Daniels, moved to Jackson Heights, where he attended P.S. 143. His mother was busy managing Daniels Restaurants, and sent Daniels to live with his maternal grandmother, Alice Harmon Guillory, who owned a café in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas. There, Daniels attended E.O. Smith Junior High School, and experienced southern segregation for the first time. After his grandmother fell ill, Daniels stayed with relatives in Houston's Pleasantville neighborhood. He briefly lived with his strict uncle in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, before joining his brother, Max Newsome, Jr., in Chicago, Illinois in 1959. There, he attended the Holy Trinity School, and then Farragut High School. Daniels moved with his brother's family to the South Side in 1962, and graduated from Hirsch High School in 1964.

Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_003, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

George Daniels began playing the trumpet after seeing a performance by trumpeters Miles Davis and Maynard Ferguson in Chicago, Illinois. He joined the band at Farragut High School, and continued playing after his transfer to Hirsch High School in 1962. Daniels also held several restaurant jobs, working alongside his father, George Daniels, Sr., who moved to Chicago from New York City. Seeking better pay, Daniels applied for a job at the United States Steel Corporation; and, although he was underweight, was hired after reporting to his physical examination in severe weather. Following his high school graduation in 1964, Daniels began dating Minnie Riperton, who was a receptionist and recording artist at Chess Records. There, he was introduced to the company's manager, Billy Davis, who also owned the Chevis Publishing Corporation. Daniels soon obtained a position at Chess Records, where he witnessed the recording sessions of artists like Muddy Waters, Etta James and The Dells.

Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_004, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

George Daniels' father, George Daniels, Sr., hosted musical acts like Miles Davis and Oscar Peterson at one of the Daniels Restaurants locations in New York City. As a young man in Chicago, Illinois, Daniels attended record hops on the South Side, and watched blaxploitation films downtown. While working at the Marlow Machine Center, Daniels was called to repair a piece of equipment at Ernie's One Stop Records. There, he met Lorenzo Marvel, who offered him a position at the store, which was one of a number of black-owned wholesale record shops in the city. Daniels was mentored by the store's owner, Ernie Leaner, who introduced him to the music industry's majority white trade organizations. In 1969, Daniels bought out Ernie's One Stop Records, and opened his own record store, George's Music Room. The business became so successful that Daniels opened multiple locations, including a store in a white

neighborhood, where he employed a fair-skinned Latino manager to hide that the shop was black-owned.

Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_005, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

George Daniels owned George's Music Room in Chicago, Illinois. He struggled financially in the mid-1970s, but resolved his debts with the help of a bankruptcy lawyer. In 1990, Daniels founded the National United Independent Retailers to protect small, black-owned businesses. His business thrived during this time, due in part to his elaborate promotional displays, such as the installation of a large inflatable buttocks to promote Sir Mix-A-Lot's 'Baby Got Back.' George's Music Room also hosted performances by musical artists like Alicia Keys, Mary J. Blige and The Temptations. The shop's success benefitted the surrounding businesses in North Lawndale; and Daniels mentored the neighborhood youth, including artists Common, R. Kelly and Twista, who were raised on Chicago's West Side. In 1999, Mayor Richard M. Daley asked Daniels to open a location of Georges' Music Room at the Chicago Midway International Airport. Daniels reflects upon his life, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with George Daniels, Section A2007_156_001_006, TRT: 0:19:35 ?

George Daniels became familiar with the historic Record Row music district of Chicago, Illinois during his four-decade career as a record store owner. Located on Michigan Avenue between 12th Street and 26th Street, the district was home to record stores and studios like Chess Records, Vee-Jay Records and Scepter Records. The Johnson Publishing Company, the headquarters of Jet and Ebony magazines, was also located in the area, at the southwest corner of 18th Street and Michigan. Daniels talks about the shift toward digital distribution in the music industry, as well as the changes in the radio broadcasting business. He describes his family, including his wife, Regina Daniels; and children, George Daniels III and Maxine Daniels. Daniels concludes the interview by describing his concerns for youth in the United States, and how he would like to be remembered.