



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Willie D. Davis

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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>	Willie D. Davis
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 9, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:54:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast executive and football player Willie D. Davis (1934 - ) played for the Cleveland Browns and Green Bay Packers, winning Super Bowls I and II. In 1981, Davis was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He is also the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 9, 2007, in Culver City, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_200
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive and football player Willie D. Davis was born on July 24, 1934, in Lisbon, Louisiana to Nodie Bell and David Davis. Recruited to Grambling College (now Grambling State University) by football coach Eddie Robinson, Davis captained the football team and was a student on the dean's list for two years. In 1956, he graduated from Grambling with his B.S. degree in math and industrial arts.

Davis was drafted by the Cleveland Browns in the seventeenth round of the 1956 National Football League Draft. However, that same year, Davis was also drafted into the U.S. Army and was unable to begin his NFL career until 1958. After two years with the Browns, Davis was traded to the Green Bay Packers. For ten seasons, Davis played 138 consecutive regular season games and was a member of all five of Vince Lombardi's NFL title-winning teams, playing in Super Bowls I and II. In his career with the Green Bay Packers, Davis recovered twenty-one fumbles, setting a team record, never missing any of the 162 games in his twelve-year tenure. Davis was awarded the Associated Press' All-Pro honors in 1962 and from 1964 to 1967. During the last two years of his football career, Davis studied at the University of Chicago, earning his M.B.A degree in 1968. The following year, the Packers honored Davis' retirement with Willie Davis Day. That same year, Davis purchased the West Coast Beverage Company and served as its president for eighteen years, while also working as a color commentator on the NFL telecasts for NBC in the early 1970s. Since 1976, Davis has been the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc., a Los Angeles broadcasting company which owns radio stations in the Midwest and Southern California. In 1981, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Davis served as the director of the 1984 Olympics Committee in Los Angeles in 1984. That same year, President Reagan appointed him to the President's Commission on the Executive Exchange.

Davis has served on the boards of the Sara Lee Corporation, the National Association of Broadcasters, Dow Chemical Company, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Johnson Controls, MGM Mirage, Manpower, Fidelity National Financial, Wisconsin Energy, Strong Management Fund, Mattel Toys, Schlitz Brewing Company, Fireman's Fund Insurance, Bassett Furniture, Alliance Bank, the Green Bay Packers, the Kauffman Foundation, Occidental College and K-Mart. Davis is also an Emeritus Trustee for the University of Chicago and a Trustee at Marquette University. In 2001, Davis co-chaired and founded the Vince Lombardi Tometown Legends, a charitable organization created to assist various charities throughout Wisconsin. Davis was named the Walter Camp Man of the Year, was ranked 69th on "The Sporting News'" list of the 100 Greatest Football Players and was given the Career Achievement Award from the NFL Alumni. Davis and his wife Ann have a son, Duane, and a daughter, Lori.

Willie D. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 9, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Willie D. Davis was conducted by Jacques Lesure on July 9, 2007, in Culver City, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Broadcast executive and football player Willie D. Davis (1934 - ) played for the Cleveland Browns and Green Bay Packers, winning Super Bowls I and II. In 1981, Davis was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He is also the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc.

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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:

Davis, Willie D.

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Davis, Willie D.--Interviews

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African American football players--Interviews

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African American radio broadcasters--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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National Football League.

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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BusinessMakers

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SportsMakers

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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 Willie D. Davis, July 9, 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 8/9/2011 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, July 9, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:30  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis discusses his early life in Louisiana and his relationships with his parents, Nodie Bell Allen and David Davis. Davis speaks affectionately of his mother, who worked as a kitchen helper at the Texarkana Country Club. She hoped that her children would have better life opportunities than their parents and so instilled the value of education in them. She was originally opposed to Davis playing high school football for fear of him being injured but changed her mind when she realized how important it was to him. While his mother worked her way up to head cook, his father drifted from job to job, eventually abandoning the family. Davis also reflects on the difficulty of growing up without a father and their reconciliation decades later.

African American families--Louisiana.

High school football players—Arkansas—Texarkana.

Parent-Child Relations.

Single parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:20  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis talks about rebuilding a relationship with his father, who worked for him later in life at the West Coast Beverage Company. Davis then describes his childhood and his extended family on both sides. When he was in the fourth or fifth grade, his mother moved the family from Louisiana to Texarkana where she worked at the Texarkana Country Club. His family always ate well due to the leftovers that his mother brought home from work. She eventually married Edward Archie, who was kind but never adopted the children for reasons that Davis does not know. In Texarkana, Davis lived on Ash Street where there was an invisible line of racial segregation separating one side of the street from the other. Although Davis does not recall overt racial tensions, he was aware of an unspoken rule about staying on the correct side of the racial line.

Race awareness--United States.

Segregation--Arkansas--Texarkana.

Race relations—Arkansas—Texarkana.

Stepfathers.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:50  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis relates stories of his life from his school years. He showed the

first signs of athletic ability, particularly speed and agility, in elementary school. Davis first considered becoming a professional athlete in high school where he played on the Washington High School football team with friends Ed Finn, Eugene Marshall, Johnnie Walker, and Louis Allen. Davis recalls his high school years fondly, noting that Principal Mosley, Coach Ed Nathan Jones, and math teacher Miss Grant were significant influences on him. Winning the state championship was an important symbol of his ability to succeed. He describes Grambling College football coach Eddie Robinson's recruitment visit to his home. During high school, Davis also worked at the Texarkana Country Club to earn extra money. Davis' mother's faith and the family's weekly attendance at the African Methodist Church were major factors in shaping his religious beliefs.

Robinson, Eddie.

Student activities.

Football players—Recruiting.

African Americans--Religion.

High school football players.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:20  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis discusses his time at Grambling College and the influence of legendary Coach Eddie Robinson. Davis shares his mindset during Robinson's recruitment visit to his home. Almost all of the southern black colleges tried to recruit Davis but Robinson convinced him and his mother that Grambling was the best choice. However, Davis struggled with loneliness at Grambling as it was his first time away from home. After a week, he escaped campus in a milk truck in order to return home. An assistant coach caught up with him in Shreveport and convinced him to speak to Robinson before leaving. Robinson persuaded him to stay at Grambling, reminding him of the greater career possibilities and the potential to help his family if he attained a college education. Robinson became a father figure to Davis, honing his football skills and encouraging his education.

Robinson, Eddie.

Grambling State University.

Grambling State University--Football.

African American universities and colleges—United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:20  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis discusses the beginning of his professional football career. Davis notes that his leadership in football prepared him well for the corporate world. In 1956, Grambling was crowned National Black Champions in a victory over Florida A&M. Cleveland Browns coach Paul Brown saw the game and Davis' twenty-seven tackles, leading the Browns to draft him in the seventeenth round. Although unsure about going to Cleveland, Robinson encouraged him to try the NFL. However, after two army draft deferrals in college, the draft board called his number up in Cleveland, forcing him to leave the Browns. Davis played football in the Army in Colorado Springs, Colorado, winning the service championship. In 1958, Davis returned to the Browns. Davis describes fitting in at Cleveland and the need to be better than the other players because of his race. Davis was traded to the Green Bay Packers in 1960. Cleveland Browns (Football team : 1946-1995).

United States.—Army—Football.

Football draft—United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007\_200\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:40  
2007/07/09

Willie D. Davis shares anecdotes about Vince Lombardi and his fellow Green Bay Packers. He describes his sense of personal achievement at his induction into the Football Hall of Fame in 1981. Davis discusses his transition from football to the corporate world. Key to his business success was the M.B.A. degree that he earned in 1968 at the University of Chicago where he developed a personal relationship with economist Milton Friedman. Davis talks about his business ventures. He briefly co-owned an Atlanta radio station with Quincy Jones, who made a deep impression on him. He discusses his experience serving on the boards of corporations—including Dow Chemical Company, Fireman's Fund Insurance, K-Mart, Mattel Toys, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, MGM Mirage, National Association of Broadcasting, Sara Lee, Schlitz Brewing Company, Strong Management Fund, Wiscon Energy—sometimes as the only African American. Davis hopes to leave a legacy of successful radio stations for his descendants.

Lombardi, Vince.

Green Bay Packers (Football team).

Directors of corporations.

Corporate governance.