

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rita Frances Dove

---

## 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>	Dove, Rita
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 6, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:57:02).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fiction writer, english professor, and poet Rita Frances Dove (1952 - ) won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; served as Poet Laureate of the United States and Consultant to the Library of Congress from 1993 to 1995; and served as Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2004 to 2006. Aside from winning numerous other awards, Rita Dove was also Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Dove was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 6, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_324
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Poet Laureate of the United States Rita Dove was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1952. A 1970 Presidential Scholar, she received her B.A. degree summa cum laude from Miami University of Ohio and her M.F.A. degree from the University of Iowa. She also held a Fulbright scholarship at the Universität Tübingen in

Germany.

Rita Dove served as Poet Laureate of the United States and Consultant to the Library of Congress from 1993 to 1995 and Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2004 to 2006. She has received numerous literary and academic honors, among them the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and, more recently, the 2003 Emily Couric Leadership Award, the 2001 Duke Ellington Lifetime Achievement Award, the 1997 Sara Lee Frontrunner Award, the 1997 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, the 1996 Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities and the 1996 National Humanities Medal. In 2006 she received the coveted Commonwealth Award of Distinguished Service (together with Anderson Cooper, John Glenn, Mike Nichols and Queen Noor of Jordan).

Dove has published the poetry collections *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), *Museum* (1983), *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), *Grace Notes* (1989), *Selected Poems* (1993), *Mother Love* (1995), *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), *American Smooth* (2004), a book of short stories, *Fifth Sunday* (1985), the novel *Through the Ivory Gate* (1992), essays under the title *The Poet's World* (1995), and the play *The Darker Face of the Earth*, which had its world premiere in 1996 at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and was subsequently produced at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., the Royal National Theatre in London and other theatres. *Seven for Luck*, a song cycle for soprano and orchestra with music by John Williams, was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood in 1998. For “America’s Millennium,” the White House’s 1999/2000 New Year’s celebration, Dove contributed — in a live reading at the Lincoln Memorial, accompanied by John Williams’ music — a poem to Steven Spielberg’s documentary *The Unfinished Journey*. She is the editor of *Best American Poetry 2000*, and from January 2000 to January 2002 she wrote a weekly column, “Poet’s Choice”, for *The Washington Post*.

Dove is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, where she lives with her husband, the writer Fred Viebahn. They have a grown daughter, Aviva Dove-Viebahn.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rita Frances Dove was conducted by Adrienne Jones on November 6, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fiction writer, english professor, and poet Rita Frances Dove (1952 - ) won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; served as Poet

Laureate of the United States and Consultant to the Library of Congress from 1993 to 1995; and served as Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 2004 to 2006. Aside from winning numerous other awards, Rita Dove was also Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

---

## **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:**

Dove, Rita

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Dove, Rita--Interviews

---

African American women poets--Interviews

---

African American women authors--Interviews

---

African American women educators--Interviews

---

Poets laureate--Interviews

---

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

University of Virginia

---

**Occupations:**

English Professor

---

Fiction Writer

---

Poet

---

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

## **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 Rita Frances Dove, November 6, 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 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).

---

## **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 Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove was born on August 28, 1952 in Akron,

Ohio to Elvira Hord Dove and Ray Dove. Dove's maternal grandfather, Thomas Hord, came to Akron from Wartrace, Tennessee as a young man. Her maternal grandmother, Georgianna Jackson Hord, grew up in Washington, D.C., where Dove's mother was born; and later moved to Akron. There, Dove's grandfather was a custodian, and her grandmother made hats. They also formed a travelling singing group with their four children. Dove's mother graduated from high school early, and was admitted to Howard University, but not allowed to attend. Instead, she enrolled at a business school in Akron. Dove's paternal grandparents, Lucille Nettle Dove and Joseph Dove, were from Rockmart, Georgia, and moved to Akron when her father was young. There, her paternal grandfather worked in a rubber factory, and her grandmother was a homemaker. Dove's father studied chemistry at the University of Akron, and then enrolled in an accelerated graduate program at the University of Illinois.

African American women poets--Interviews.

African American women authors--Interviews.

African American women educators--Interviews.

Poets laureate--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove's father, Ray Dove, studied chemistry at the University of Illinois through a U.S. Army program, until being transferred to combat in Italy. Upon returning to his hometown of Akron, Ohio, he met Dove's mother, Elvira Hord Dove, whom he married in 1946. Dove's father applied for a research position at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, but was hired as an elevator operator. His former classmates, who were white, advocated on his behalf, and he was promoted to chemist. As a child, Dove often visited her maternal grandparents, Georgianna Jackson Hord and Thomas Hord, who told her of her about their journey to the North. Although she was initially skeptical of her grandparents' stories, they later inspired her poetry collection, 'Thomas and Beulah.' Dove also describes her parents' personalities, including her mother's insistence on protecting her children from

bullies, and her father's stoic response to racial discrimination.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:20 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove grew up with her three siblings in Akron, Ohio. She and her older brother, Ray Dove, were especially close. They teased their younger sister, Robin Dove Waynesboro; and played with their youngest sibling, Rhonda Dove Harrison. Dove and her brother also created a newsletter about their neighborhood in Akron, and read comic books and magazines together. Dove's parents did not limit them to reading children's books, and sent a note to a librarian who tried to prevent Dove from borrowing an adult novel. When Dove was in the second grade, her family moved to a large home in an all-white neighborhood of Akron. There, Dove's family, including her many cousins, gathered for the holidays. She recalls going on a spontaneous, overnight trip to Niagara Falls with her parents and siblings at ten years old; and, on another occasion, travelling with her extended family to vacation in Mexico City, Mexico.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:45 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove initially lived in a racially mixed, working class neighborhood in Akron, Ohio; and moved to a majority white, middle class community when she was in the second grade. There, she enrolled at Schumacher Elementary School, where she encountered discrimination for the first time, when her friend used a racial slur. Dove was influenced by her fourth grade teacher, who encouraged her to write; and her first black teacher, Mrs. Ford, who taught the fifth grade. During this time, Dove began playing the cello. In 1963, her father participated in the March on Washington, while Dove, her siblings and mother stayed with her mother's family in Washington, D.C. From 1964, Dove attended Akron's Simon Perkins Junior High School, where she was placed in an accelerated program. She recalls her seventh grade English teacher, who refused to teach poetry; and her eighth grade teacher, who allowed the students to write freely each week. Although Dove enjoyed writing, she did not

aspire to it as a career.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:32 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove matriculated at the integrated John R. Buchtel High School in Akron, Ohio during the late 1960s, and the Civil Rights Movement was ongoing. During this time, Dove and her friend became the first African American members of the school's majorette squad. Dove went on to serve as a co-chair of the squad during her senior year, alongside one of her white peers. She was prevented from holding the position on her own, due to the racial discrimination of the white students' parents. In addition, Dove continued playing the cello, and performed with her classmates at school events and Akron's jazz clubs. Although Dove was the valedictorian of her class, she was not encouraged to apply to Ivy League schools. Instead, upon graduating from high school in 1970, she enrolled at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, which offered her financial aid, and had a strong humanities curriculum. There, Dove majored in English, and aspired to attend law school.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:42 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove was introduced to poetry as a career by her high school English teacher, Margaret Oechsner, who brought Dove to a reading by poet John Ciardi. At Miami University, Dove's composition class was taught by fiction professor Milton White, who also influenced her to become a poet. During her final year of college, her work was published in a contemporary poetry anthology; and, upon graduation, Dove received a Fulbright Fellowship to study at Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen in Tübingen, Germany, where she learned to speak German. The following year, Dove attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop in Iowa City, Iowa. There, she met her husband, writer Fred Viebahn, who was visiting from Germany. She also discovered the writing of Toni Morrison, which inspired Dove to write more about her own experiences. Dove talks about the influence of the Black Arts Movement on her writing style, which was less militant than that of earlier African American poets.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop in Iowa City, Iowa. Although she was the only African American student, her peers of color included Latina poet Sandra Cisneros and Native American poet Joy Harjo. Upon graduating in 1977, she moved to Oberlin, Ohio with her husband, Fred Viebahn, who had been offered a position at Oberlin College. While in Oberlin, Dove wrote the poetry collection 'The Yellow House on the Corner.' They remained there for two years, and spent five months in Jerusalem, Israel before moving to Germany, where they worked as freelance writers. From 1981, Dove taught at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, and returned to Germany each summer. In Arizona, Dove witnessed racial discrimination against Native Americans for the first time. She also gave birth to her daughter, Aviva Dove-Viebahn; and completed her collection of poetry, 'Thomas and Beulah.' During her husband's fortieth birthday party, Dove learned that the book had won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

Video Oral History Interview with Rita Frances Dove, Section  
A2007\_324\_001\_008, TRT: 0:30:24 2007/11/06

Rita Frances Dove won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry; and, the next year, was recruited to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville by poet Charles Henry Rowell, who was the editor of Callaloo magazine. She secured media and speaking engagements, and also continued writing. In 1989, Dove published 'Grace Notes,' which was less narrative than her previous poetry collection. Then, she published her novel, 'Through the Ivory Gate,' which she began in Israel ten years prior; and wrote the play 'The Darker Face of the Earth.' In 1993, Dove was offered the position of poet laureate, and accepted. During her tenure, she worked to make poetry more accessible to the public, and hosted events that combined poetry with jazz music. After two years in this role, she decided to return to teaching and writing, and resigned from her post as poet laureate. Dove also talks about the differences between writing poetry and prose.