

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Carolyn Armenta Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Carolyn Armenta, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis,
Dates:	November 21, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:48:53).
Abstract:	Community leader Carolyn Armenta Davis (1944 -) produced three Black Diaspora landmark projects: the 1976-77 Black Classical Composers radio series; the 1978 award-winning Feminine Footprint syndicated radio series; and the 1990-2000 exhibition, Design Diaspora: Black Architects and International Architecture. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_141
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Curator, historian, lecturer, writer and producer Carolyn Armenta Davis is a native of Gary, Indiana and attended Froebel Public School from kindergarten until graduation from high school. Davis received her B.A. degree in mathematics from Indiana University in 1970.

After being a permanent high school substitute teacher from 1966 to 1970 in the Gary Community School District in Gary, Indiana, Davis moved to Chicago,

Illinois, where she worked from 1970 to 1973 as executive staff of the American Medical Association's Department of Community Health Care. For nine months in 1973, Davis was a television news writer for WMAQ-TV, the Chicago NBC affiliate. In 1974, Davis started her communications business in Chicago. She provided public relations, marketing communications, and media production services to national and international corporations, non-profits, and governments agencies, domestic and foreign. Davis independently created, wrote and produced three landmark projects on accomplishments of men and women of the African Diaspora. Her debut project, *The Black Classical Composers*, was the first radio series on classical music written from 1771 to 1975 by Blacks and its 39, 1-hour programs aired from 1976 to 1977 on fine arts station WEFM-Chicago. In 1978, Davis did the *Feminine Footprint* radio series of mini-documentaries on 65 African American women trailblazers; it aired nationwide on 91 stations and earned the American Women in Radio and Television Award.

In 1990, Davis launched her Design Diaspora: Black Architects and International Architecture 1970-1990™ exhibition-lecture project on fifty contemporary African American, Black-European and African architects from eleven countries. From 1993 to 2000, Davis toured the Black Architects project to twenty venues in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

Davis continues to write and lecture on Black Diaspora architects. Lectures have included African Union of Architects Congress and Assembly, Nairobi, Kenya; International Biennial of Architecture, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Amerika Haus, Munich, Germany; University of Cape Town, South Africa; The Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland; Society of Black Architects, London, England; Illinois-National Organization of Minority Architects, Chicago, IL; Chicago Cultural Center; Chicago, IL. In 2008, she lectured at the National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.; Boston Society of Architects AIA, Boston, MA; and Chicago Architecture Foundation.

Architecture writings by Davis include reviews of 1992's *African American Architects in Current Practice* by Jack Travis and in 1994 of *Architect to the Hollywood Stars*, Paul R. Williams by Karen E. Hudson plus articles on Pritzker Architecture Prize Laureates Christian de Portzamparc, Tadao Ando, and Sverre Fehn.

In 1997, Davis served on the design jury for the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Union of International Architects (UIA), and Republic of Senegal International Competition for the Design of the Gorée Memorial Complex for Dakar, Senegal.

In 2002, the documentation of contemporary Black Diaspora women architects compiled by Davis was added to the archives of the Winifred Foundation in the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Davis has served on several non-profit organizations' boards. She is a member of numerous organizations including the Chicago Architecture Foundation, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, the Society of Architectural Historians, International Women Associations, Chicago; Old Town Triangle Association, Chicago; the Lincoln Park Renewal Corporation; and the NAACP.

In 2004, Davis qualified for a Series 3 License, National Commodity Futures registration.

Davis is writing a book on 21st century Black Diaspora architecture.

Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 21, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community leader Carolyn Armenta Davis (1944 -) produced three Black Diaspora landmark projects: the 1976-77 Black Classical Composers radio series; the 1978 award-winning Feminine Footprint syndicated radio series; and the 1990-2000 exhibition, Design Diaspora: Black Architects and International Architecture.

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

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:

Davis, Carolyn Armenta, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Carolyn Armenta, 1944---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Carolyn Armenta Davis, November 21, 2008. 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 Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section A2008_141_001_001, TRT: 0:29:38 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis was born on March 8, 1944 in Gary, Indiana to Armenta Matthews Davis and Richard Davis, Sr. Her maternal grandmother died while giving birth to Davis' mother in 1914 in Helena, Arkansas. There, while her family worked as cotton pickers, Davis' mother learned to play piano. As a child, her mother was sent to live with her relatives in Gary, where she graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in the mid-1930s. Davis' father was born in Georgia in 1909. His stepfather helped fund his education at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, where he studied brick masonry; and then at the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in Nashville. Davis' father moved to Gary, where he laid brick, sold real estate and insurance, taught and built houses with his brothers. He was also active in the public school system. Davis' parents met at the Campbell Friendship House, a community center in Gary; and had eight children, of whom Davis was a middle child.

Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section A2008_141_001_002, TRT: 0:30:02 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis grew up in the steel mill town of Gary, Indiana. Her father, Richard Davis, Sr., sold insurance and real estate, while her mother was a homemaker. They taught their children the importance of education from an early age. In Gary, Davis' family lived near the library and the Froebel School, where she began her education. She studied piano under Violet Crump, the wife of violinist Roscoe Crump, who played with the Northwest Indiana Symphony. Her sister, Sandra Davis Turner, played piano at the local churches, like the First Baptist Church, where Davis' Girl Scout troop held meetings. The church was led by Reverend Robert E. Penn, and hosted the Fisk Jubilee Singers on occasion. In this part of the interview, Davis describes Gary's social history, including the development of the steel industry, the misconceptions about the city's residents and the

generational differences in education. Davis lived in Gary at the time of Mayor Richard Hatcher's election in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section A2008_141_001_003, TRT: 0:29:22 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis was raised in a nurturing home in Gary, Indiana. Davis' parents regularly exposed her and her siblings to the arts in Gary, as well as in Chicago, Illinois. In Gary, she began her schooling at the Froebel School, which shared its campus with Friedrich Froebel High School. As a high school student there, Davis was active in academic clubs like the world affairs forum. She excelled in math and science, and aspired to join the space program or become an actuary. Upon graduation, Davis studied for two years at Indiana University Northwest in Gary, before transferring to Indiana University in Bloomington in the mid-1960s. She enjoyed her time there, but neglected her studies, and ultimately completed her undergraduate degree in French and math at Indiana University Northwest. From 1967 to 1970, Davis taught in Gary's public schools, including Tolleston High School. She then moved to Chicago to work for the American Medical Association.

Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section A2008_141_001_004, TRT: 0:29:02 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis moved in 1970 to Chicago, Illinois to work in the department of community healthcare at the American Medical Association. During this time, she met author Studs Terkel, who became her mentor. After a New York City executive suggested that Davis consider a career in media, she secured a position at WMAQ-TV in Chicago, in spite of her lack of experience. She wrote for the station's newsroom in 1973, but was laid off due to an economic recession. Davis then worked in publicity for clients like musician James Taylor and politician Richard H. Newhouse, Jr. In 1976, she began a research project on 'The Black Classical Composers,' which resulted in thirty-nine hour-long programs about black composers like Chevalier de Saint-Georges and John Wesley Work III. She sold the rights to WEFM Radio, a classical music station based in Michigan City, Indiana. Her second major project, 'Feminine Footprints,' aired on

the Mutual Black Network in 1978.

Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section
A2008_141_001_005, TRT: 0:30:27 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis's second major research project, 'Feminine Footprints,' explored the leadership of African American women in a range of fields, including fashion design, dentistry and government. Similar to her research on African American classical composers, the project culminated in sixty-five one-minute radio segments, which aired in 1978. Her third project, 'Design Diaspora: Black Architects and International Architecture 1970-1990,' featured American architects like John Warren Moutoussamy, Sr. from Chicago, Illinois, as well as those from abroad, such as Pierre Goudiaby Atepa from Senegal. Additionally, Davis was a juror for the Chicago Architecture Foundation's Newhouse Architecture and Design Competition. At this point in the interview, Davis describes the influence of culture and economics on a country's architecture. She explains that she considers her research to be a catalyst for others, rather than a conclusive body of work. She also talks about the healing power of music.

Video Oral History Interview with Carolyn Armenta Davis, Section
A2008_141_001_006, TRT: 0:20:22 2008/11/21

Carolyn Armenta Davis conducted research on African American classical composers, architects and female leaders, which she used to produce radio programs that were well received by the African American community. At the time of the interview, she intended to expand her work on black diaspora architecture to the contemporary era. She also describes her hopes for the African American community. Davis concludes the interview by reflecting upon her health, life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered.