

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Karen Hunter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hunter, Karen
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter,
Dates:	August 3, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:04:57).
Abstract:	Publishing chief executive and author Karen Hunter (1966 -) worked as a columnist for the New York Daily News where she won a Pulitzer Prize before becoming a frequent book collaborator. She also founded Karen Hunter Publishing and First One Digital Publishing. Hunter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 3, 2012, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_166
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Publisher and author Karen Hunter was born on April 24, 1966 in Orange, New Jersey. In 1983, she graduated from Marylawn of the Oranges Academy in South Orange, New Jersey. After high school, Hunter attended Drew University, where she received her B.A. degree in English.

In 1989, Hunter joined the *New York Daily News* where she worked as a columnist and covered numerous topics for the paper, including sports, business, and news

stories. From 1996 to 1998, Hunter worked as a professor of journalism at New York University. In 1999, as a member of the *Daily News*' editorial board, she received a Pulitzer Prize for the paper's series of editorials that formed a campaign to save the Apollo Theater in Harlem. While still at the *New York Daily News*, Hunter also began writing music reviews, through which she met various musicians, including LL Cool J. It was through him that Hunter began writing books, starting with a collaborative effort to write LL Cool J's memoir *I Make My Own Rules*. She also has collaborated in creating the celebrity memoirs of Queen Latifah and Kris Jenner, as well as Reverend Al Sharpton's book *Al on America*. Other books that Hunter worked on discussed issues of African American culture, such as Karyn Langhorne Folan's *Don't Bring Home a White Boy*.

In 2002, Hunter took a new academic position as an assistant visiting professor at Hunter College in the Department of Film and Media Studies. From 2003 to 2006, she co-hosted a morning talk show with Steve Malzberg at the AM radio station WWRL. Hunter also became a contributor to many cable news channels, including appearances on the *Paula Zahn Now* show on CNN and MSNBC.

In 2007, Hunter became CEO of her own publishing company, Karen Hunter Publishing, as an imprint of Simon and Schuster Publishing. The label publishes mostly popular nonfiction targeted towards the market for African American titles. In 2010, she published a book as the sole author, called *Stop Being Niggardly*, which is addressed to African Americans and their successes. In 2011, Hunter began a separate business venture called First One Digital Publishing that focuses solely on e-books for electronic reading devices.

Hunter lives in New York City.

Karen Hunter was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 3, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Karen Hunter was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 3, 2012, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Publishing chief executive and author Karen Hunter (1966 -) worked as a columnist for the *New York Daily News* where she won a Pulitzer Prize before becoming a frequent book collaborator. She also founded Karen Hunter Publishing and First One Digital Publishing.

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:

Hunter, Karen

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hunter, Karen--Interviews

African American authors--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American college teachers--New York (State)--New York--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Publishing Chief Executive

Author

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Karen Hunter, August 3, 2012. 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 Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_001, TRT: 1:30:15 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter talks about her family background. Her mother, Margie Sweeper, was born on April 2, 1943, in Augusta, Georgia, to John Henry Sweeper and Julia Blunt Sweeper. Julia Blunt Sweeper was a domestic and a nurse's aide from Augusta, Georgia. John Henry Sweeper was a carpenter born into South Carolina's Gullah Geechee culture. After the couple divorced, Julia Blunt Sweeper raised her children in a household that was conservative. Margie Sweeper attended Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, where she met Donald Hunter. Donald Hunter was born on December 12, 1940, in Newark, New Jersey, to Colia Hunter, a store owner, and Vernell Hunter. Donald Hunter saved enough money to attend college, and enrolled in Allen University in 1958 with the help of his cousin, John Hunter, head of the university's music

department. Karen Hunter also talks about musician and recording artist James Brown, and his impact on those from Augusta, Georgia.

African American families.

Paine College.

African American mothers.

African American fathers.

Allen University.

Brown, James, 1933-2006.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_002, TRT: 2:29:22 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter describes her father's response to discrimination at Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina. Raised in Newark, New Jersey, Donald Hunter was outspoken against southern racism. While visiting Augusta, Georgia, with his friend John Henry Sweeper, Jr., Hunter met Sweeper's sister, Margie. The two were married in 1964, and gave birth to Karen Hunter in 1966. Margie Sweeper suffered a number of miscarriages after Hunter's birth, but had a son in 1988. Hunter describes the role of the church in her parents' childhoods, as well as her father's personality. A dapper man, Donald Hunter had a strong work ethic, yet suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder. He worked as a parole officer and owned Hunter Corner Store. Hunter notes that her father's attitude towards playing Scrabble reflected his driven nature. She also talks about the 1968 riots in Newark, New Jersey. She describes her childhood household, and her earliest childhood memory, tying her shoes at two years old.

Allen University.

Racism--Southern States.

African American families.

African American fathers.

Riots--New Jersey--Newark.

Childhood and youth--New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_003, TRT: 3:28:31 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter describes the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood. The Hunter family moved from an apartment to the Presidential section of East Orange, New Jersey, a middle-class African American neighborhood, around 1970. Hunter recalls playing with neighborhood children, watching Walter Cronkite on CBS Evening News with her father, Donald Hunter, and reading books. Hunter describes her transition from public school to a Catholic school, and talks about the ways in which her fifth grade teacher shaped her. Hunter was a bright student. She skipped the seventh grade and participated in programs like Presidential Classroom in Washington, D.C. Hunter graduated from Marylawn of the Oranges Catholic High School in 1983. Hunter recalls her love of reading as a youth, as well as the parties and music that were a common part of her East Orange, New Jersey household.

Childhood and youth--Activities--New Jersey--East Orange.
African American neighborhoods--New Jersey--East Orange.

African Americans--Education--New Jersey--East Orange.
Presidential Classroom for Young Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_004, TRT: 4:29:16 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter describes how her view of religion has evolved over the years. Hunter attended Catholic schools from sixth grade through high school, and was particularly influenced by the nuns at Marylawn of the Oranges Catholic High School. While in high school, Hunter traveled to Washington, D.C., Paris, and Spain. Hunter graduated in 1983, and applied to Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, after being rejected by the Ivy League schools to which she applied. At Drew University, Hunter had a reputation as a mediocre student who produced phenomenal work. Hunter was a resident assistant and ran a fried chicken business out of her dorm. She also attempted to audition for Saturday Night Live during her senior year. After graduating from Drew University in 1987, Hunter landed her first job selling Funk and Wagnalls dictionaries door-to-door.

African Americans--Religion--New Jersey--East Orange.
African Americans--Education, Secondary--New Jersey--
East Orange.

Drew University.

African American college students--Activities--New
Jersey--Madison.

Door-to-door selling.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_005, TRT: 5:29:54 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter landed her first job as a salesperson for Funk and Wagnall dictionaries after graduating from Drew University in 1987. She quit after a few weeks, and responded to a job posting for a position at the News Record, where she was hired as a sports editor. Hunter embraced learning on the job, and was quickly hired as a sports reporter at the Star Ledger. After she was let go, Hunter was hired as a high school sports writer for the New York Daily News in 1989, but transitioned to writing news features. Hunter describes the two stories that changed her perception of journalism, as well as the dynamics of covering male sports as a female. She closes describing how she kept her position at the New York Daily News.

Door-to-door selling.

African American editors.

Sportswriters--African American.

Star-ledger (Newark, N.J.).

New York Daily News (Firm).

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_006, TRT: 6:30:21 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter talks about writing for the business section of the New York Daily News and her relationship with her mentor, Hap Hairston. Hunter describes how the New York Daily News' racist environment motivated Hunter, and as a result, she was invited to sit on the New York Daily News' editorial board in 1995. This experience changed her perception of writing for news, and challenged her to broaden herself and her understanding of diversity. Hunter eventually transitioned from writing

editorials to writing music reviews. Writing a music review on L.L. Cool J in 1996 led her to write his autobiography. Though the book was a bestseller, the book contract did not compensate her well, which played a major role in influencing her future business decisions. Hunter continued to write for the New York Daily News, and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1999 for helping pen a series on saving the Apollo Theater. Hunter closes by describing the backlash she received for writing the series.

New York Daily News (Firm).

African Americans--Mentoring.

Racism in the workplace.

LL Cool J, 1968-

Pulitzer Prizes.

Apollo Theater (New York, N.Y. : 125th Street).

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_007, TRT: 7:31:28 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter helped to investigate the conditions and management of the Apollo Theater for the New York Daily News in 1999, which led to a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial series. Hunter talks about the importance holding black leaders accountable, the challenges black journalists in the mainstream media face, and the difficulty of maintaining journalistic integrity. In 1996, Hunter started teaching journalism at New York University, and began serving as a volunteer teacher for the Legal Outreach program in Harlem, New York City, New York. Hunter started a short-lived online women's sports magazine at the height of the dot com boom, but transitioned to radio in 2003 when she became the host of a morning talk show at WWRL-AM. Hunter describes some of the subject matter the show dealt with, including black/Jewish race relations in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York City, New York.

Apollo Theater (New York, N.Y. : 125th Street).

Race relations--New York (State)--New York.

African American leadership.

New York University.

African American college teachers.

Radio talk show hosts--African American--New York
(State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_008, TRT: 8:30:09 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter started teaching journalism at Hunter College in New York City, New York, in 2002. A year later, she began hosting a morning talk show on WWRL-AM. While balancing these positions, Hunter became the New York Daily News' first African American female news columnist. Hunter talks about her final column for the New York Daily News, which predicted Barack Obama's presidential candidacy in 2004. In 2005, Hunter collaborated with J.L. King on the New York Times bestseller, *On the Down Low*. In 2007, she launched Karen Hunter Publishing with the goal of producing authentic books that transcend race. Hunter describes the responsibilities and challenges of being a publisher, and talks about some of her most meaningful projects, including working with Janet Jackson, Patti LaBelle, Kris Jenner, and a teenager from Brooklyn. Hunter considers the impact Karen Hunter Publishing has on inciting dialogue surrounding race, and explains her motivations behind boycotting Donald Trump.

Hunter College.

Radio talk show hosts--African American--New York
(State)--New York.

New York Daily News (Firm).

King, J. L.

Trump, Donald, 1946-

African American press.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen Hunter, Section
A2012_166_001_009, TRT: 9:05:41 2012/08/03

Karen Hunter reflects upon her legacy as someone who inspires people to improve, to learn, and to grow. She talks about her family, and her father Donald Hunter, who recently passed away. Hunter closes the interview by sharing how she would like to be remembered as teacher who inspired others.

African American families.

African American fathers--Death.