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.

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**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
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.
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
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.
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.
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.

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.

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 fathers--Death.