

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William 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>	Davis, William Conan, 1926-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Davis,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 1, 2013 and January 30, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	13 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:05:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Chemist and chemistry professor William Davis (1926 - ) is professor emeritus of the natural science department at St. Philip's College. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 1, 2013 and January 30, 2013, in San Antonio, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_029
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Research chemist and chemistry professor William C. Davis was born on August 22, 1926 in Waycross Georgia to parents Kenice and Laura Jane Davis. In 1941, Davis moved to New York City to live with his brother, Ossie Davis, and attend college. Following graduation from Dwight High School in 1945, Davis attended City College of New York and New York University before enrolling at Talladega College in Florida. Davis left school and briefly served as second lieutenant of engineers in the Korean War. Returning to Talladega College after the War, Davis earned his B.S. degree in chemistry in 1956. Davis went on to earn his M.S. degree in organic chemistry from Tuskegee Institute in 1958 and his Ph.D. degree

in biochemistry from the University of Idaho in 1965.

Upon graduation, Davis was appointed research director at Physicians Medical Laboratories. As director, Davis is credited with discoveries leading to or improving numerous amenities, among them the potato chip, the instant mashed potato, soft serve ice cream, and the organic glue that holds together wood-chip and particle board. Davis' research has been public in academic journals such as, *Journal of Medical Technology* and *European Journal of Pharmacology*. From 1974 to 1975, Davis continued research as a visiting scientist at the George Hyman Research Institute in Washington, D.C.; and again between 1976 and 1982 when he was a research associate at the University of Texas Health Science Center. Davis was named full professor of chemistry at St. Philip's College in 1995. In addition he served as chair of the Natural Sciences Department and director of Renewable Energy. When Davis retired in August 2009, he was named professor emeritus of the natural science department; and, the science building at St. Philip's College was named in his honor.

Davis professional and academic affiliations include the American Chemical Society, the Health Physicist Society, the Society of Nuclear Medicine, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His is a recipient of Tuskegee Institute's George Washington Carver Fellowship, the U.S. Armed Force's Purple Heart Medal, and was inducted to the Texas Hall of Fame in 2000.

Davis and his wife, Ocia, live in San Antonio, Texas. They have two children: Mark Alan and Cheryl Elise.

William C. Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 1, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 1, 2013 and January 30, 2013, in San Antonio, Texas, and was recorded on 13 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chemist and chemistry professor William Davis (1926 - ) is professor emeritus of the natural science department at St. Philip's College.

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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, William Conan, 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, William Conan, 1926---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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St. Phillips College

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## **Occupations:**

Chemist

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Chemistry Professor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers

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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 William Davis, February 1, 2013 and January 30, 2013. 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

## 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

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section A2013\_029\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:47 2013/01/30

William Davis talks about his family background. His maternal grandfather, Jonas Franklin, was a Sioux Indian who migrated from the Midwest to the South Atlantic region of the United States and attended the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Davis' mother, Laura Cooper, was born in July of 1898 in Lake City, South Carolina. She was raised by her grandmother until she was eight years old. Cooper subsequently moved to Georgia, where she was then raised by her her mother, who married into the Cooper family. She aspired to attend college after finishing high school, but was not supported by her family due to her being a child born out of wedlock. Davis' paternal grandfather, Raiford Chapman David, was from Ethiopia. Although he was raised adhering to Judaism, he later adopted Christianity and raised his family as such. Davis' father, Kince Chapman Davis, was born in 1887 in Kinston, North Carolina.

African American families--Southern States.

African Americans--Relations with Indians.

Illegitimate children--United States.

Jews, Ethiopian--Family relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section A2013\_029\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:38 2013/01/30

William Davis was born in Waycross, Georgia in 1926. He talks about his siblings: his eldest brother, Ossie Davis, who was an actor, director, author and social activist; his sister, Essie Morgan Davis, a social worker and administrator; Kenneth Curtis Davis, a pharmacist; and James Davis, a biology teacher in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Davis' father, Kince Davis, was an entrepreneur and railroad construction engineer known for overseeing the construction and maintenance of a railroad owned by Alex Sessoms, a wealthy white landowner. His father and Sessoms experienced a great deal of opposition for their business relationship. He later left that job to pursue other entrepreneurial interests, such as starting a herbal pharmacy. Although he was not educated and unable to read English, he read Hebrew and was an admirer of the philosophies of George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington.

Davis, Ossie.

African American actors--Family.

African American fathers--Employment.

African American fathers--Conduct of life.

African American businesspeople--Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section A2013\_029\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:01 2013/01/30

William Davis' earliest memories are of his attempts to garner his father's attention and of a man attempting to steal chickens from his family's chicken house. Davis also describes other memories from his childhood, and his childhood household. He remembers receiving visits from his Ethiopian family members and the smell of goat meat that they would eat. They were Jewish, just like Davis' father, Kince Davis, although he practiced Judaism in secret. Davis' father did not take kindly to working for white people and after leaving his position as a railroad engineer, he pursued his entrepreneurial interests by opening an herbal drugstore. His business was under suspicion by the Lowndes County police. Although they appointed a black man, a mortician named Fonza Curry, to assassinate him, the plan was never executed. Davis began school at Magnolia Grammar School in Valdosta, Georgia.

He talks about the schools that he and his siblings attended.

African American fathers.

Fathers and sons--Georgia.

Childhood--Georgia.

African American fathers--Religious life.

Schools--Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:41 2013/01/30

William Davis attended Magnolia Grammar School in Valdosta, Georgia. He recalls his teachers as being fair skinned and skilled musicians. Davis talks about his favorite grade school teachers as well as his academic performance. After completing the seventh grade, Davis attended Dasher High School. While he had no formal science instruction in grammar school or at Dasher, Davis' affinity towards science was influenced by his fascination with his father's profession as an herbalist. As an herbalist, his knowledge of plants and their medicinal properties enabled him the ability to act as a healer of ailments such as the cold, the flu, and hypertension. His father, who was also an admirer of George Washington Carver, also encouraged Davis' interest in science by taking him and his brothers to visit the Tuskegee Institute. Davis talks about traveling to Tuskegee in his father's car and his experience of meeting George Washington Carver.

Elementary schools--Georgia.

Science--Vocational guidance.

Herbalists--Georgia.

Tuskegee Institute.

Carver, George Washington, 1864?-1943

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:43 2013/01/30

William Davis talks about his trip to Tuskegee, Alabama to visit the Tuskegee Institute and his memories of seeing Henry Ford and George Washington Carver. Davis attended Dasher High School in Valdosta, Georgia. His science instruction there was limited to an introductory

course that taught the fundamentals of the scientific method. He recalls his science teacher, Mr. Downs, as being a staunch proponent of scientific logic and its credibility over faith and religion. After graduating from Dasher, Davis, under the encouragement of his father, decided that he needed to pursue further science instruction in New York City. He moved with his brother, Ossie Davis, and attended Dwight High School, where he took courses in chemistry, biology and physics. Davis talks about his experience at Dwight High School, his mentor, Jake Fishman, and his interest in the intersection of science, religion and philosophy.

Tuskegee Institute.

Ford, Henry, 1863-1947.

Science--Study and teaching (Secondary)--New York (State)--New York.

Mentoring in science.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:17 2013/01/30

William Davis graduated and received his diploma from Dasher High School in 1944. He then studied science for a year at Dwight High School in New York before enrolling in the City College of New York (CCNY). Due to his troubles with calculus, the then president of the college, Buell Gallagher, who was also the former president of Talladega College in Alabama, encouraged him to transfer to Talladega, where he would receive better attention. Much of Davis' family attended Talladega. He reflects upon his experience at Talladega and his appreciation of the family-like atmosphere on the campus. He was drafted to serve in the Korean War a year into his studies at Talladega. He talks about his experience in the U.S. Army, his experience serving in Germany, his appreciation of music, and meeting Albert Schweitzer. Davis received the Purple Heart Medal in 1953 and returned to Talladega, where he resumed his studies in chemistry.

African American universities and colleges.

Talladega College--Alumni and alumnae.

Korean War, 1950-1953--African Americans.

Purple Heart.

Chemistry--Study and teaching (Higher)--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_001\_007, TRT: 7:29:01 2013/01/30

William Davis received his B.S. degree in chemistry from Talladega College in 1956. He then received a George Washington Carver Fellowship to attend the Tuskegee Institute, where he pursued his M.S. degree in organic chemistry. Under the guidance of Dr. Clarence T. Mason and Dr. Wernher Von Braun, Davis' master's research focused on the hydrolysis rate of sulfur-containing compounds in jet fuel. Although he was awarded a scholarship to continue a graduate degree in education, Davis desired to continue his efforts in research. After receiving his M.S. degree in 1958, Davis and his wife moved from Alabama to Idaho. Davis describes his journey to Idaho and talks about one of his peers' views on space colonization.

African American college students--Scholarships, fellowships, etc.

Von Braun, Wernher, 1912-1977

Moving, Household.

Space colonies.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_001\_008, TRT: 8:27:16 2013/01/30

William Davis moved to Moscow, Idaho after completing his M.S. degree in organic chemistry from the Tuskegee Institute. Davis talks about his journey from Alabama to Idaho and his attempt to visit the Mormon Tabernacle in Utah. After settling in Idaho, Davis joined Washington State University's Chemical Research Section of the College of Engineering and the Division of Industrial Research. Davis' first research job was extracting sugar from Western Larch trees. He also worked with Dr. Mark Adams doing clinically related research. Davis talks about his experience working at Washington State University, his experience in Idaho, and the research philosophy of scientists.

Tabernacle (Salt Lake City, Utah).

Washington State University. College of Engineering.  
Research Division.

Western larch--Utilization.

University of Idaho.

Scientists--Philosophy.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_002\_009, TRT: 9:28:27 2013/02/01

William Davis received his Ph.D. degree in biochemistry from the University of Idaho in 1965. Davis' doctoral research focused on potatoes, which led to improvements in the way potato chips are made and an improved the sloughing technique for creating instant mashed potatoes. While working on his doctoral degree, Davis continued collaborating with other scientists and laboratories at Washington State University, doing research in a diverse array of areas. Davis also conducted research in a mail-order laboratory that led to cost-effective innovations in the processing of bodily fluids and tissues. His research activities led to his becoming a nuclear chemist, health physicist, and medical technologist in Portland, Oregon. Davis describes his research activities and talks about his interest in music, Albert Schweitzer and Dr. Wernher von Braun.

Potatoes--Research.

Washington State University.

Scientists--Intellectual life--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_002\_010, TRT: 10:29:31 2013/02/01

William Davis was appointed as a clinical chemist, head of the radioisotopes department and physicist at United Medical Laboratories in Portland, Oregon. The principal investigator of the lab facilitated a cost effective mail-order processing system where outside entities, nationally, were able to send in bodily fluids and tissues for testing. This created dissonance among the public after his operations were publicized by broadcast journalist, Walter Cronkite. Davis talks about the clinical research that he participated in at that lab, as well as his professional activities, research interests, and his observations of the

varying health care providers. His clinical background influenced his interest in contributing to community healthcare. In 1972, he founded the Albina Health Care Center Medical Clinic in Portland. He also established a sickle-cell anemia clinic with the Black Panthers.

Scientists--Employment--(Portland, Or.).

United Medical Laboratories--Press coverage.

Public health--Social aspects--United States.

Health services accessibility--United States.

Black Panther Party--History.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_002\_011, TRT: 11:28:28 2013/02/01

William Davis shares his stories of working with Dr. Lehman while in Portland, Oregon. In 1979, Davis moved to San Antonio, Texas and joined the University of Texas Health Science Center as a research associate. While there, he worked with M.K. Ticku on performing assays on psychoactive drugs, such as Valium. With the desire to uphold his promise to his father, Davis resolved to pursue more teaching opportunities. In 1983, Davis was appointed as an instructor in the chemistry department at St. Philips College. He talks about his professional activities at St. Philips College, as well as the history and demographics of the institution.

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Psychotropic drugs--Analysis.

St. Phillip's College. Chemistry Department--Faculty.

St. Phillip's College--History.

St. Phillip's College--Demographic aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_002\_012, TRT: 12:29:39 2013/02/01

William Davis joined St. Philip's College in San Antonio, Texas in 1983. While working with the department of natural sciences, he was contracted to conduct research on the boiling point, clearing rate, pH, polarity and surface tension of water for a bottled water company called Penta Water. Penta Water promotes their water as being uniquely distinct from traditional water because of its chemical

properties, and particularly the way it performs with cells, due to the way it is processed. Davis and his cohorts dubbed the water “kinetic water” because of its behavioral properties. Davis explains the benefits of kinetic water, the processes of osmosis and isotonicity, and the tendencies of nature.

Bottled water--Analysis.

Penta Water Company, Inc.

Osmosis.

Video Oral History Interview with William Davis, Section  
A2013\_029\_002\_013, TRT: 13:16:20 2013/02/01

William Davis retired from St. Philips College in 2009. In 2012, the science building there was re-named in his honor. Davis’ hope for the African American community is for more people to become educated and qualified to improve the state of the environment. He considers his legacy to be his major accomplishments: improving the uses of the potato and improving the process of making ice cream. Davis also talks about his family, and reflects upon how he would like to be remembered.

Building dedications--Texas--San Antonio.

African Americans--Education.

Potatoes--Utilization.

Ice cream, ices, etc.--United States.