

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Michael Blakey

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Blakey, Michael L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey,
Dates:	February 27, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:58:00).
Abstract:	Biological anthropologist Michael Blakey (1953 -) former curator of William Montague Cobb Biological Anthropology Laboratory and director of the African Burial Ground Project, is the National Endowment for the Humanities professor at the College of William and Mary. Blakey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 27, 2013, in Williamsburg, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_051
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Biological anthropologist and research director Michael L. Blakey was born on February 23, 1953 in Washington, D.C. Blakey received his B.A. degree in anthropology from Howard University in 1978. He continued his studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and earned his M.A. degree in 1980. Blakey travelled to England to do research on the biology of contemporary Londoners at the University of London and Oxford University. In 1985, Blakey received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Upon graduation, Blakey began teaching at Howard University where he was the curator of the William Montague Cobb Human Skeletal Collection, one of the largest systematic collections of documented human skeletons in the world. He has held visiting positions at a variety of institutions, including Spelman College, Universita Di Roma, the Smithsonian Institutions, Columbia University, and Brown University. From 1991 to 1994, Blakey served as the director of the African Burial Ground Project in New York City, one of the most important archaeological finds in the United States during the 20th century. He co-edited a report on the work he did there, *The New York African Burial Ground: Unearthing the African Presence in Colonial New York, Vol. 1; Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground*, which was published by Howard University Press in 2009. Following the conclusion of the African Burial Ground Project, Blakey was named a professor of American Studies and College of William and Mary. In 2003, Blakey was appointed as the director and the National Endowment for the Humanities Professor of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary Institute of Historical Biology.

Blakey has served on many boards of the American Anthropological Association and published more than forty articles on the history and philosophy of science, paleopathology, historical demography, medical psychophysiology, and racism. His work can be found in journals such as *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, *American Anthropologist*, *International Journal of Anthropology*, and *Critique of Anthropology*. Blakey received an Honorary Doctorate of science degree in 1995 from York College of the City University of

New York.

Blakey lives and works in Washington D.C. with his wife, Cecelie Counts Blakey, and their son, Tariq Blakey.

Biological anthropologist and research director Michael L. Blakey was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 27, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Michael Blakey was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 27, 2013, in Williamsburg, Virginia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Biological anthropologist Michael Blakey (1953 -) former curator of William Montague Cobb Biological Anthropology Laboratory and director of the African Burial Ground Project, is the National Endowment for the Humanities professor at the College of William and Mary.

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:

Blakey, Michael L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Blakey, Michael L.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

African Burial Ground (New York, N.Y.) College of William and Mary

Occupations:

Biological Anthropologist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Michael Blakey, February 27, 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 5/30/2023 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 Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_001, TRT: 1:28:47 ?

Michael Blakely describes the Nanticoke and African American ancestry of his mother, Thelma Mildred Mosley Blakey. Blakely talks about his maternal grandparents, Charles Benson and Sarah Mosley, who worked in a chicken processing plant. He discusses his mother's education and how, as a child, she received the highest I.Q. score in a mixed blood class in Delaware. Blakey talks about his mother's exposure to African American culture during the Harlem Renaissance. He explains how his parents met. His father, Katus Reginald Blakey was her professor at Delaware State University in Dover, Delaware. After they married, he became an administrator at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and eventually became a dental student. Blakey describes his mother's occupations as a nurse technician, a researcher, a shop owner, a painter, and a health educator. He recalls how when his father died they moved to Jamaica.

Affirmative action programs.

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Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_002, TRT: 2:29:35 ?

Michael Blakey describes his father's, Katus Reginald Blakey, side of the family. He talks about his paternal grandparents', Arthur Gilbert Blakey and Jessica Cobbs, schooling. He describes his grandfather's work at a brick kiln while at Meharry Medical School in Nashville, Tennessee. His grandfather passed the Virginia Medical Board in 1917 and began his medical practice under the Jim Crow laws of that era. He shares his father's experience in the Army and at Virginia State College in Ettrick, Virginia. His father taught at Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware where he met Blakey's mother, Thelma Mildred Mosley Blakey, who was a student of his. Blakey describes their relationship and how times have changed.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_003, TRT: 3:29:39 ?

Michael Blakey discusses his parents', Katus Reginald Blakey and Thelma Mildred Mosley Blakey, personalities and who he takes after. He describes his neighborhood in the Platinum Coast section of Washington D.C., as well as his earliest memory, and the sights, sounds and smells of his childhood. He speaks about his family's summer house in Cappahosic, Virginia, and visiting his grandparents. Blakey talks about his brothers, Jeffrey Norman Blakey and Kevin Charles Blakey and describes his mother's reaction to the case of Brown v. Board of Education of 1954. He ends by describing his childhood interest in anthropology and paleontology and his elementary and junior high schools. Blakey also reflects on the legacy of the Amidon Plan.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_004, TRT: 4:32:42 ?

Michael Blakey discusses the Amidon Plan and Washington D.C. He talks about the grades he received at Johnson Junior High School and his early interest in science. His great-uncle Kermit Mosley influenced his interest in anthropology, archaeology, and paleontology. Blakey talks about his visits to Calvert Cliffs, Maryland to collect fossils and winning his science fair competition. He shares his experiences as a teenager with the Maryland Archaeological Society and describes his paleopathology research as a summer intern at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1968. He talks about the importance of Louis S.B. Leakey and Montague Francis Ashley-Montagu to the scientific professions. He was able to secure Leakey's autograph at a lecture during one of Leakey's international tours.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_005, TRT: 5:29:06 ?

Michael Blakey reflects on his experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. He also talks about why he turned away from religion at age ten and became an atheist. He describes the black student union at Calvin Coolidge High School in Washington, D.C., where he played an active role. Blakey was arrested during an anti-war protest at the White House in 1970 where he was pictured in a 'Washington Post' article on African American activism. He discusses his move away from anthropology in favor of social activism and music. He also talks about his graduation from high school and his decision to not attend college immediately after high school.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_006, TRT: 6:28:50 ?

Michael Blakey talks about his parents', Katus Reginald Blakely and Thelma Mildred Mosley Blakey, activism and their decision to leave the United States to live in Jamaica in 1971 due to persecution-style tax audits and phone taps. He discusses his decision in 1975 to study anthropology at Howard University after failing the music program there in 1972, and his father's assistance in his being readmitted. He talks about his father's death shortly afterwards. Blakey describes his parents' support of his studies and the power struggle between the sociology and anthropology departments at Howard University. Blakey talks about African American anthropologists and their shift from Euro-American views to Afrocentric and activist ones.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_007, TRT: 7:29:11 ?

Michael Blakey talks about the activist scholar Olauda Equiano. Blakey also describes how religion in America was used to justify slavery as gives President Thomas Jefferson's 'Notes on the State of Virginia' as an example. He reflects on his mentors at Howard University and his decision to attend the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts for graduate school in order to become a theorist. He also talks about the importance of African American faculty. Blakey describes his process in graduate school for determining from a person's teeth the time and duration of disruption in childhood growth. He details his internship at the Smithsonian Institute where he worked with the Hrdlicka Papers, the published papers of the founder of American anthropology Ales Hrdlicka, and was able to show that Hrdlicka was not as liberal or anti-racist as previously viewed.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section A2013_051_001_008, TRT: 8:30:10 ?

Michael Blakey describes the difficulty in publishing his 1987 paper, 'Skull Doctors: Intrinsic and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology: With Special Reference to the Work of Ales Hrdlicka,' and the controversy it caused. Blakey talks about his time studying at Oxford University in Oxford, England and his research on the relationships between stress levels and income and racism at Otmoor, Oxford in England. He also talks about his doctoral research on race and stress in Britain and the United States. Blakey describes his contribution to the 1994 book 'Diagnosing America' and talks about what he did immediately after receiving his Ph.D. degree from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Massachusetts. In addition, Blakey discusses the effects his work has had on the field of anthropology.

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Video Oral History Interview with Michael Blakey, Section
A2013_051_Blakey_Michael_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:12:14