

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Brent Staples

PERSON

**Staples, Brent A., 1951-**

**Alternative Names:** Brent Staples;

**Life Dates:** September 13, 1951-

**Place of Birth:** Chester, Pennsylvania, USA

**Residence:** Brooklyn, NY

**Work:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Editorial Writer; Author

## Biographical Note

Journalist and author Brent Staples was born on September 13, 1951, in Chester, Pennsylvania. His father, Melvin Staples, was a truck driver; his mother, Geneva, a homemaker. The oldest son of nine children, Staples grew up in Chester, but, due to his family's financial problems, moved seven times before finishing junior high school. After being approached by the only African American professor at Widener University, then the Pennsylvania Military College, Staples was accepted into Widener through a program called Project Prepare. He graduated from there in 1973 with his B.A. degree in behavioral science. Staples was awarded two doctoral fellowships; one from the Danforth Foundation and another from the Ford Foundation. He went on to receive his Ph.D. degree in psychology from the University of Chicago in 1982.

From 1977 until 1981, Staples taught psychology at various colleges in Pennsylvania and Chicago. Then, in 1983, he was hired at the Chicago Sun-Times as a science writer. In 1985, Staples moved to The New York Times, where he was hired as an editor of The New York Times Book Review. Staples also frequently contributed to the Times Magazine and the Book Review. In 1986, he published the essay, "Just Walk on By" in Ms. magazine, a piece that would eventually be required reading for college courses throughout the country. Staples became an assistant editor for metropolitan news at The New York Times in 1987, and was appointed a member of The New York Times Editorial Board in 1990.

In 1994, Staples' autobiography *Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White*, was published. *Parallel Time* was awarded the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award in 1995, and was also a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize. In 2000, he was awarded an

Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from Mount St. Mary College. In 2006, Staples was awarded a Fletcher Foundation Fellowship for his book-in-progress, *Neither White Nor Black: The Secret History of Mixed-Race America*. He has also served as a visiting fellow for multiple organizations including the Hoover Institution, the University of Chicago and Yale University.

Brent Staples was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 18, 2013.

## Related Entries

**University of Chicago** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ph.D.**

**Widener University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**Chicago Sun-Times** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1982 to 1985]

**Reporter**

**New York Times** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1985 to ?]

**Reporter and Editor**

**Hoover Institution** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2003 to 2003]

**Fellow**

**University of Chicago** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2004 to 2004]

**Fellow**

**Yale University** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2009 to 2009]

**Fellow**