

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ernie Suggs

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Suggs, Ernie, 1967-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs,
Dates:	February 18, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:02:05).
Abstract:	Journalist Ernie Suggs (1967 -) is a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the former vice president of the National Association of Black Journalists, and author of the award-winning series <i>Fighting to Survive: Historically Black Colleges and Universities Face the 21st Century</i> . Suggs was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 18, 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_073
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Ernie Suggs was born in 1967 in Brooklyn, New York. He entered into college at North Carolina Central University in 1985, where he was editor and chief and sports editor for the college's award winning newspaper, *The Campus Echo*, and a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. He graduated in 1990, with his B.A. degree in English Literature.

In 1990, Suggs was awarded an internship by the National Association of Black

Journalists (NABJ) to work for Gannett Newspapers based in White Plains, New York. He returned to Durham, North Carolina in 1992, as a writer for *The Herald-Sun*. In 1996, Suggs was awarded a fellowship from the Education Writers Association, which culminated in his seventeen piece series *Fighting to Survive: Historically Black Colleges and Universities Face the 21st Century*. He went on to become a reporter at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 1997, where he covered politics, civil rights and race. In 2001, Suggs authored the Aetna African American History Calendar, which was focused on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Suggs' series on HBCUs was the most in-depth newspaper examination of the topic ever undertaken, and was recognized for many awards: Journalist of the Year from the American Association of University Professors; First Place, Salute to Excellence Journalism Award for Investigative Reporting from the National Association of Black Journalists; Journalist of the Year from the North Carolina Black Publishers Association; Journalist of the Year from the North Carolina Press Association; and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In 2002, he was named director of Region IV of the NABJ, and became vice-president of the organization in 2005. Suggs was chosen for the prestigious Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University in 2008, and in 2009, he joined the Nieman Foundation's board. In 2010, he was the keynote speaker at 61st Annual Honors Convocation at North Carolina Central University; and he was given the Pioneer Black Journalist Award by NABJ in 2013.

Ernie Suggs was interviewed by *The History Makers* on February 18, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ernie Suggs was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 18, 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist Ernie Suggs (1967 -) is a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the former vice president of the National Association of Black Journalists, and author of the award-winning series *Fighting to Survive: Historically Black Colleges and Universities Face the 21st Century*.

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:

Suggs, Ernie, 1967-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Suggs, Ernie, 1967---Interviews

Organizations:

Occupations:

Journalist

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 Ernie Suggs, February 18, 2014. 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 Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_001, TRT: 1:29:29 2014/02/18

Ernie Terrell Suggs was born on March 18, 1967 in Brooklyn, New York. He is named after the boxer, Ernie Terrell. Suggs' mother, Thelma Suggs, was born in 1949 in North Carolina. Suggs' maternal grandmother, Rosanna Suggs, attended the Joseph Keasbey Brick Agricultural, Industrial, and Normal School, an all-black boarding school in Whitakers, North Carolina. She died when she was twenty-four years old. His maternal grandfather, James Odom, served in the U.S. Army and worked as a taxi driver in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Suggs' mother was raised in Edgecombe County, North Carolina by her father, her aunt Clarene, and a woman named Alice Wells, after her mother's death. Thelma Suggs moved to New York City in the 1960s where she met Suggs' father, Shepherd York. York was born in Sumter County, South Carolina in 1947. His mother, Willa Mae York, moved her eight children to Brooklyn, New York in the mid-twentieth century. Though Suggs' father was not in his life, he was close to his paternal aunts and cousins.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_002, TRT: 2:28:22 2014/02/18

Ernie Suggs grew up in the cultural center of Brooklyn, New York in the 1970s and often visited the Brooklyn Museum, Prospect Park, and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. He credits trips to these cultural outlets and his parents for nurturing his early academic ambitions. He developed his interest in the news by reading the New York Post and the New York Daily News. Suggs remembers when the Yankees won the World Series in 1977 and 1978 and recalls attending block parties where

DJs were playing early hip hop songs. He enjoyed reading and playing pickup basketball as a child and watched his cousins play in the Rucker Basketball League. Suggs attended Brooklyn's P.S. 241 where he was enrolled in the gifted program. Suggs' parents never married, but had three children at a young age. Suggs was raised with his younger brother, but his sister disappeared when he was young. Reunited in 2009, he learned that she had been taken by a couple and raised on Long Island, New York. Suggs describes his similarity to his mother.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_003, TRT: 3:28:54 2014/02/18

Ernie Suggs developed a love for literature, particularly comic books, at an early age. He enjoyed the Marvel Universe because it was set in fictionalized New York City. He remembers his favorite teachers at P.S. 241 in Brooklyn and listening to early hip hop records at Brooklyn block parties. In 1979, his family moved the family to North Carolina where he attended two junior high schools and then enrolled at Rocky Mount Senior High School in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. At Rocky Mount Senior High, Suggs was not placed in the accelerated track, but he did take college prep courses. He also wrote for the school newspaper and managed the varsity basketball and football teams. Suggs recalls black and white students participating in the same activities despite the remnants of segregation. Suggs received little help from his high school guidance counselor during his college application process. Through the intercession of a community counselor, he decided to enroll at North Carolina Central University in 1985.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_004, TRT: 4:29:25 2014/02/18

Ernie Suggs wrote for the daily newspaper in Rocky Mount, North Carolina while a student at Rocky Mount High School. Suggs majored in English literature at North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina. He was a writer and an editor for the campus newspaper and had several mentors during college. At NCCU, he also had the opportunity to meet HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson during Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign.

In 1988, he interned for Gannett Westchester Newspapers in New York through an internship funded by the National Association of Black Journalists. Suggs accepted a full-time position with Westchester Newspapers after graduating from North Carolina Central in 1990. After covering the municipal affairs of Westchester County for two years, he left the newspaper to join the staff of the Herald Sun in Durham. Suggs primarily reported on North Carolina's historically black colleges and universities. In 1996, he produced a series of articles on HBCUs nationally.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_005, TRT: 5:28:41 2014/02/18

Ernie Suggs published a series of articles, 'Fighting to Survive: Historically Black Colleges and Universities Face the 21st Century,' in 1996 as a reporter for the Herald Sun in Durham, North Carolina. The series explored the challenges facing HBCUs as well as the future of these institutions. He volunteered at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia and reported on the Centennial Olympic Park bombing for the Herald Sun. Suggs talks about the sports programs at North Carolina Central University. Suggs formed a National Association of Black Journalist chapter in Durham, and became an active member of the NABJ in 1997. Suggs joined the Atlanta Journal-Constitution as a staff writer in 1997. Most of his reporting has dealt with race and prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, such as HistoryMakers Joseph Lowery, C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young, and Fred Shuttlesworth. He talks about the movie industry in Atlanta and the current state of city politics as well as Georgia state politics.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Suggs, Section
A2014_073_001_006, TRT: 6:37:14 2014/02/18

Ernie Suggs has reported extensively on the family of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution in Atlanta, Georgia. Many of his stories have explored how King's children have dealt with their father's legacy and fought over their father's property and publicity rights. In 2001, he covered Martin Luther King, III's election as president of SCLC. Suggs

comments upon the organization's activism during the early years of the 21st century. In 2006, he covered Coretta Scott King's funeral. In 2014, King, III and Dexter King sued Bernice King for rights to their father's Bible and Nobel Peace Prize. Suggs was a Nieman Journalism Fellow at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 2008. He describes the experience of being at Harvard during the 2008 presidential campaign and the celebration of the election of HistoryMaker Barack Obama. Suggs describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He talks about his family and reflects upon his legacy.