

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, George, 1939-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Davis,
Dates:	May 19, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:50:11).
Abstract:	Journalist, educator, and author George Davis (1939 -) is a professor emeritus at Rutgers University and the author of numerous books, including the novel <i>Coming Home</i> , and the national bestseller, <i>Black Life in Corporate America: Swimming in the Mainstream</i> . Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 19, 2014, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_124
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist, educator and author George Bernard Davis was born on November 29, 1939 in Shepherdstown, West Virginia to Reverend Clarence and Winnie (Ross) Davis. He attended public schools in Virginia, Maryland and West Virginia, and was among a handful of students who integrated Baltimore City College (high school), where he graduated in 1957. Davis then enrolled in Colgate University and spent the summer of his junior year with Operations Crossroads Africa in the Niger River Delta in Nigeria. He graduated from Colgate University with his B.A. degree in anthropology in 1961 and joined the United States Air Force, where he flew forty-seven combat missions during the Vietnam War and was promoted to captain.

Davis worked first for *The Washington Post* as a reporter and day city editor from 1968 to 1969. He then moved to *The New York Times*, where he served as an editor in the Sunday Department from 1969 to 1970. Davis earned his M.F.A. degree in creative writing from Columbia University in 1971, and was hired as an assistant professor at Bronx Community College of The City University of New York. In 1980, he was appointed as an assistant professor at the Newark campus of Rutgers University, and went on to be named professor emeritus. Davis has also held adjunct positions at Colgate University, Columbia University and the Yale School of Organization and Management. In addition, he has served as a contributing editor to *Essence* magazine and *Black Enterprise* magazine, writes The Modern Melting Pot blog at *Psychology Today*, and has contributed articles to *The Huffington Post*, *The Washington Post* and other online journalism websites. In the mid-1990s, Davis conducted the Spiritual Intelligence Action Research Project at Rutgers University; and in 2013, established *The Bay is Dying* – an Ecology Game.

Davis authored the novel *Coming Home* (1971), which was judged a Notable Book of the Year by *The New York Times Book Review*. *Coming Home* also supplied the story upon which the Academy Award-winning Jane Fonda anti-war film of the same name was based. Davis went on to publish many additional books, including *Love, Black*

Love (1974); the national bestseller, *Black Life in Corporate America: Swimming in the Mainstream* (co-authored with Glegg Watson, 1982); *Soul Vibrations: Astrology for African Americans* (co-authored with Gilda Mathews, 1996); *Love Lessons: African Americans and Sex, Romance, and Marriage in the Nineties* (1998); *Barack Obama America and the World* (2011); *The Melting Points – A Spiritual Spy Novel* (2012); and *Spiritual Intelligence* (2012).

George Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 19, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 19, 2014, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist, educator, and author George Davis (1939 -) is a professor emeritus at Rutgers University and the author of numerous books, including the novel *Coming Home*, and the national bestseller, *Black Life in Corporate America: Swimming in the Mainstream*.

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:

Davis, George, 1939-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Davis, George, 1939---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Journalist

Educator

Author

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 George Davis, May 19, 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 6/7/2022 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 George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_001, TRT: 1:28:45
2014/05/19

George Davis, professor emeritus and author, was born on November 29, 1939 in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. His mother, Winnie Davis, was born Winne Ross in 1912 at Flovilla, Georgia. His father, Clarence Davis, was born in 1896. The two met in Chicago, where Winnie lived and near where Clarence attended seminary at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. She left Georgia for Chicago in her early teens and stayed there with her sister, working as a maid and at Marshall Field & Company department store. Davis recalls that his mother, a reserved woman, was always very expressive when describing her husband's courtship of her. Davis' father, on the other hand, was usually talkative. He was a Methodist minister, as were many others in his family. His father held several services on Sunday, which Davis and his brothers were required to attend with their mother. As a child, Davis recalls the ease with which he could recite scripture which very much pleased his parents.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_002, TRT: 2:30:18
2014/05/19

George Davis describes his parents' life in Chicago before their move to Baltimore, where his eldest brother, Clarence, Jr., was born. At Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Davis' father studied Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, among other things. He and Davis' mother frequented clubs on Chicago's south side. Davis mentions his brothers and their careers. As a child, Davis moved around frequently due to his father's ministry. He recalls attending elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse in Virginia, as well as being among four African Americans who integrated Wheeling High School, in Wheeling, Virginia. After moving to Maryland, he was among ten to integrate his new high school, Baltimore City College. He describes both integrations as smooth, though not without their tensions. He mentions that his parents had different opinions on integration; his mother being wary and his father embracing it wholeheartedly.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_003, TRT: 3:28:57
2014/05/19

George Davis describes his time in high school at Baltimore City College where he ran track and was interested in writing. Davis aspired to study physics but later changed his mind. He applied to several colleges and received a Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation scholarship to attend a school of his choice including Princeton University, but ultimately he decided to attend Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. Life at Colgate differed culturally from his life with his family. As a student, he began as a physics major but quickly decided to study English. After a racial incident with a professor, he changed majors and began to study anthropology. In the summer of 1960, he received a grant to travel to Nigeria with Operation Crossroads Africa, a cultural exchange program, with the help of an anthropology professor named Alfred Sio. This was several months prior to Nigerian independence. While living in Nigeria, Davis began his exploration of the cultural connections between West Africans and African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_004, TRT: 4:28:58
2014/05/19

George Davis describes 1961 when he traveled to Nigeria with Operation Crossroads Africa, to help build a flood wall in the village of Akubini. At Colgate, he explored his own concepts of American life in classes taught by Professor Alfred Sio. After earning his B.A. degree in 1961, he was accepted into graduate school at Brandeis University, but left his program after a few weeks to participate in civil rights activities in Savannah, Georgia, with his brother, Vernon. He then joined the U.S. Air Force and attended Officers Training School and later chose to fly reconnaissance. In early 1963, he met his wife in Sacramento, California who had been Miss Bronze California and came out of the same Church of God in Christ church as other members of the group Sly and the Family Stone. Shortly after, he was transferred to Little Rock, Arkansas where he describes the racism the two of them faced there. He also describes some of his writing, which was based on his time in the U.S. Air Force and in Vietnam.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_005, TRT: 5:30:18
2014/05/19

George Davis describes his final years in the U.S. Air Force. After resigning in 1968, he returned to the United States and worked for the Washington Post as a reporter. At the time, newspapers across the country hired many African Americans regardless of their experience with journalism. Davis describes various incidents of racial bias in the field. In 1969, he relocated to New York, where he worked for the New York Times and began to pursue his Master's of Fine Arts in creative writing at Columbia University. Davis studied under John Oliver Killens and participated in workshops that were extensions of the Harlem Writers Guild. After earning his MFA in 1971, his novel, *Coming Home*, was published. Davis describes this novel as a story of spiritual struggle and makes note of a United Artists film of the same name that strongly resembled his work for which he sued and lost. He also taught writing workshops at Columbia for two terms. He also discusses what the spiritual world means to him.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_006, TRT: 6:29:18
2014/05/19

George Davis describes how he began to explore the topic of spirituality after returning from Vietnam. Inspired by a book called *The Tao of Physics*, Davis started a project called the Spiritual Intelligence Action Project in 1990 while working at Rutgers University. He was interested in finding parallels between scientific studies about the immaterial world and spiritual understandings, and sacred traditions and what they had in common. Davis talks about his books *Coming Home*, *Love*, *Black Love* and his writing for *Essence* magazine. Perhaps his most successful book was the one he coauthored with HistoryMaker Glegg Watson, *Black Life in Corporate America*. He also developed and taught the first diversity course in America at Yale Graduate School of Management. He also talks about his book and project *Soul Vibrations: Astrology for African Americans*, on positive self-perception.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_007, TRT: 7:28:28
2014/05/19

George Davis discusses his books *Love*, *Black Love* and *Love Lessons: African Americans and Sex, Romance, and Marriage in the Nineties*. For both, he drew from interviews he conducted in the 1970s regarding love and spirituality amongst people of African descent. Davis also discusses his *Psychology Today* blog, *Modern Melting Pot*, which he began in the 2000s while contemplating President Barack Obama's rise to U.S. President. He also talks about teaching creative writing at Rutgers University and in New York City, where Walter

Dean Myers was his student. He describes the limits of teaching in a university setting, the necessity of giving students positive reinforcement, and helping his students obtain publishing deals. Davis describes his book, *Barack Obama, America and the World*, published in 2011, and reflects on the president, multiculturalism, and African American social and political tendencies.

Video Oral History Interview with George Davis, Section A2014_124_001_008, TRT: 8:25:09
2014/05/19

George Davis describes his most recent projects, including *The Bay is Dying*, a multimedia project aimed at clarifying the ways in which climate change and nature are connected to the human experience. He also describes *The Rapidly Dying Fear of a United Planet*, about espionage and spirituality in St. Kitts, and an ongoing book project called *Branches*, *From We Shall Overcome to Yes We Can* which he describes as an homage to Alex Haley's *Roots*. He describes not wanting to compromise on his work despite publishing industry pressures to do so. Davis reflects on his life, legacy, and family, as well as his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He says that certain art forms serve to keep the spirit alive, but expresses concern about their commercialism and negative role-modelling. He ends with a story about his father's final act before death, in which he and a group of Gray Panthers occupied D.C. Mayor Marion Barry's office to demand an abatement for senior citizens' bus fare.