

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Donald Camp

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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>	Camp, Donald Eugene, 1940-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 11, 2014 and June 13, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:36:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer Donald Camp (1940 - ) was an artist-in-residence and assistant professor of photography at Ursinus College from 2000 to 2010. He has been awarded numerous fellowships for his photographic artwork, and was a founding member of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists. Camp was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 11, 2014 and June 13, 2014, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_144
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Artist and photography professor Donald Eugene Camp was born on July 28, 1940 in Meadville, Pennsylvania to Ira and Martha Camp. He graduated from Camden High School in 1958 and went on to serve in the United States Air Force from 1960 to 1972.

From 1972 to 1980, Camp worked as a photographer for the *Philadelphia Evening and Sunday Bulletin*. He then returned to school and received his B.F.A. degree in 1987 and his M.F.A. degree in 1989, both from Temple University's Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He subsequently taught for two years as an assistant professor at the Tyler School of Art. Then, after receiving a number of artist fellowships in the 1990s, Camp was hired as an artist-in-residence and assistant professor of photography at Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania in 2000. Camp retired in 2012 as professor emeritus.

Camp started exhibiting his art in group shows in 1982 and in solo exhibitions in 1989. His ongoing photographic series, *Dust Shaped Hearts*, began in 1990, and sought to counter stereotypes of African American men. The series has grown to include men and women of all races, acknowledging that the struggle against ignorance and intolerance is universal. Camp's artwork has been exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Institute for Contemporary Art, the Delaware Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Noyes Museum; and is included in a number of important public and private collections including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His work has also been featured at Gallery 339 in Philadelphia for a number of years.

Camp has been honored for his work with a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and multiple Pew Fellowships. He was a Pennsylvania Visual Artist Fellow four times, and was awarded a Honickman Foundation Grant in 2008. Camp was a founding member of the

Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, and sat on the board of trustees of the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania from 2002 to 2005. He was also the subject of an American Artist Oral History at the Smithsonian Institute, and has served on the advisory board of the Creative Artist Network (now The Center for Emerging Visual Artists). He is a member of the Bahá'í Faith and lives and works in Philadelphia.

Donald Camp was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 13, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Donald Camp was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 11, 2014 and June 13, 2014, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Photographer Donald Camp (1940 - ) was an artist-in-residence and assistant professor of photography at Ursinus College from 2000 to 2010. He has been awarded numerous fellowships for his photographic artwork, and was a founding member of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists.

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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:

Camp, Donald Eugene, 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Camp, Donald Eugene, 1940---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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## Occupations:

Photographer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Donald Camp, June 11, 2014 and June 13, 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 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).

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## 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 Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:59 ?

Donald Camp was born on July 28, 1940 in Meadville, Pennsylvania to Martha Erving Camp and Ira Camp, Sr. His maternal grandmother owned a boarding house in New York, where she was later murdered by one of her tenants. Camp's mother was then kidnapped as an infant, and raised in Pennsylvania by a woman named Sylvia Prevost. Later in life, Camp's mother reunited with her family. She was an accomplished singer locally despite complications from her ongoing edema condition. As the youngest of seven children, Camp was responsible for his mother's care until she died when he was twelve years old. Camp's father was born in Columbus, Ohio to Lakota Native American Ophelia Jackson Kamper, and Sylvester Kamper, who was physically abusive. He joined the U.S. Navy, but left abruptly due to racial mistreatment. To avoid punishment for his AWOL status, Camper's father altered his last name. He then became a barber by trade, and traveled regularly to Chicago, Illinois for work before moving to Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_001\_002, TRT: 2:32:14 ?

Donald Camp's parents, Martha Erving Camp and Ira Camp, Sr., met in Pennsylvania, where they moved around frequently before settling in the predominately white community of Farrell, Pennsylvania. While Camp's father worked primarily as a barber, he also rented a small farm to feed his family. Camp grew up in a racially and economically segregated neighborhood in Farrell, where he attended L.R. Eckles Elementary School. There, he was rejected from the photography club, and mistreated by the white teachers. At this point, Camp talks about the careers of six siblings. Camp's oldest brother, Ira Camp, Jr. was a silver solderer who originally aspired to become an Olympic swimmer, but was unable to train at the local pool because of his race. His sister, Sylvia Camp, worked as a nurse while his twin brothers, Hubert Camp and Herbert Camp, became a dentist and a professional artist, respectively. Camp's brother, James Camp, was a wood sculptor, and another brother, William Camp, worked as a physician and pianist.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:10 ?

Donald Camp became interested in magic at an early age. With encouragement from his father, Ira Camp, Sr., he began to perform magic shows, and became a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and the Society of American Magicians. In 1952, he moved with his brother, James Camp, to Camden, New Jersey, after the death of their mother, Martha Erving Camp. At this time, Camp began to reject his religious upbringing. In Camden, he attended Camden High School, where he was mentored by a teacher who helped him find work as a magician. Upon graduating, Camp joined the U.S. Air Force in 1960. After basic training, he was sent to Hamilton Army Airbase near San Francisco, California. There, he listened to artists like John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Yusef Lateef. Camp was later stationed in Alaska and France, where he studied painting composition with frequent visits to the Musee du Louvre in Paris. He also attended performances by saxophonist Dexter Gordon, pianist Bud Powell and singer Nina Simone.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:30 ?

Donald Camp's interest in photography began in the late 1940s. He first learned to develop film by watching his brothers in their makeshift darkroom. Later, Camp became inspired by photographers Robert Frank and Roy DeCarava, and purchased an Argus C3 rangefinder, which he used to practice composing shots. Camp met his wife, Marie Dumont Camp, in Janville, France, and they were married in 1966. After French President Charles De Gaulle announced France's

exit from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Camp was required to leave his post at Chambley-Bussieres Air Base. Upon his return to the United States, he was stationed in Columbus, Ohio, where he joined the Baha'i faith at the suggestion of his brother, William Camp. Soon thereafter, Camp was deployed to Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, where he acted as a liaison to military leadership when tensions grew amongst the troops. Camp also describes the qualities of a good photographer, and his process for developing his identity as a photographer.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:18 ?

Donald Camp was sent to the Cam Ranh Air Base during the Vietnam War. At this point, Camp describes the U.S. military's struggle to integrate and how he was treated as a Vietnam War veteran. While in Vietnam, Camp met famous photojournalist Philip Jones Griffiths, who was impressed by his photographs. Upon his return to the United States, Camp decided to pursue newspaper photography at Griffith's suggestion. He left the U.S. Air Force in 1972, and was hired at the Philadelphia Bulletin in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, Camp became the first African American photographer at a major daily newspaper, as the newspaper industry began to diversify its staff after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Early on, he took photographs for Groundhog Day and the birth of a hippopotamus at the local zoo; and later covered the 1980 World Series and the MOVE crisis in Philadelphia. Discontent with the direction of the newspaper's content, Camp resigned. A year later the publication ceased production.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_002\_006, TRT: 6:28:18 ?

Donald Camp left the Philadelphia Bulletin in 1980. For the next two years, he worked as a freelance photographer before deciding to study fine arts photography at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For the first year, he studied visual anthropology, although he disliked the required linguistics courses. He decided to transfer to the photography program at the Stella Elkins Tyler School of Art, where he was influenced by professors William G. Larson, Winifred Ann Lutz and John Dowell as well as the work of Roy DeCarava and Robert Frank. Upon graduating in 1987, Camp was offered a professorial position at Temple University. He was also admitted to the Future Faculty Fellow Program to pursue his M.F.A., which he completed two years later. For his master's thesis project on news media, he utilized a variety of resources, including photographs and race related news clips, which he laid over a lit mirror, so that the viewer might see themselves behind these clippings.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_002\_007, TRT: 7:40:38 ?

Donald Camp joined the faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania upon graduating in 1989. He also served as the director of the Future Faculty Fellowship Program. Dismayed by the negative images of African American men in the media, Camp began working on his 'Dust Shaped Hearts' exhibit, which was named after Robert Hayden's poem 'Heart-Shape in the Dust.' He also drew inspiration from the song 'Are You Glad to Be in America' by James Blood Ulmer. Camp's subjects included his brothers; tuba player Bob Stewart and pianist Dave Burrell; and civil rights lawyer John Hope Franklin. To process the photographs, Camp used medieval art styles, egg tempera and casein. Although photographs initially received negative reviews when they premiered at Sande Webster Gallery in Philadelphia, they became popular amongst collectors. Camp talks about his approach to photography, and his fellowships. He also describes his home, which he purchased in 1974.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_002\_008, TRT: 8:29:22 ?

Donald Camp became an artist in residence and assistant professor of photography at Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania in 2000. With the guidance of his former professor, William G. Larson, Camp taught art principles instead of photography technique, and challenged students to take risks in their efforts. In 2010, Camp decided to retire from teaching at Ursinus College. He continued to showcase his photography at institutions like Austin College in Sherman, Texas, where the exhibit opened with a magic show starring the photographers. At this point in the interview, Camp talks about African American magicians, including Richard Potter, Black Herman, and Kevin Bethea. He also describes his appreciation for magician Teller of Penn and Teller, who was the inspiration behind his photograph 'A Good Son.' Camp describes his artistic philosophy, and reflects on his life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_002\_009, TRT: 9:17:18 ?

Donald Camp played a key role in the founding of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists alongside Joe Davidson and Sandra Long Weaver. He was also a member of the Society for Photographic Education. With his wife, Marie Dumont Camp, he had two daughters; homemaker Dorothea Camp and feminist historian Stephanie Camp, who died in 2014. Camp talks about his retirement and his plans for the future, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Camp, Section A2014\_144\_002\_010, TRT: 10:11:47 ?