

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Darren Walker

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Walker, Darren, 1959-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Darren Walker,
Dates:	August 26, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:16:54).
Abstract:	Nonprofit executive and foundation president Darren Walker (1959 -) was named tenth president of the Ford Foundation in 2013. He previously served as COO of the Abyssinian Development Corporation in Harlem, and as vice president for the Rockefeller Foundation's program initiatives. Walker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 26, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_170
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Non-profit executive and foundation president Darren Walker was born in Lafayette, Louisiana in 1959, and raised in Ames and Goose Creek, Texas. He graduated from The University of Texas at Austin in 1982, and received his J.D. degree from the University of Texas School of Law in 1986.

Walker was hired at the international law firm of Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton in 1986. In 1988, he joined the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS), where he spent seven years in the capital markets division. He left UBS in 1995 and worked for a year as a full-time volunteer at The Children's Storefront, an elementary school serving low-income families in Harlem. Walker then entered the nonprofit sector as chief operating officer for the Abyssinian Development Corporation, a community development organization in Harlem, where he guided efforts to develop housing for low and moderate-income families. In this capacity, he oversaw two of Harlem's largest privately financed commercial projects as well as the development of the first public school built in New York City by a community organization.

Walker was hired by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2002 as director of its domestic urban program. In 2006, he was promoted to vice president for foundation initiatives, where he led both domestic and global programs. Then, in 2010, Walker was named the Ford Foundation's vice president for Education, Creativity and Free Expression, where he shaped more than \$140 million in annual grant-making around the world. Walker was appointed the tenth president of the Ford Foundation in September of 2013, becoming the second African American to head the foundation.

He has served on the boards of the Arcus Foundation, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Friends of the High Line, the New York City Ballet, and the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies. He also co-chaired the New York Public Library Council. In addition, Walker has

taught housing, law and urban development at the New York University School of Law and Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, and is a fellow of the Institute for Urban Design. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and has received the University of Texas Distinguished Alumni Award as well as the Honorary Order of the Coif by its law school. He is the recipient of honorary degrees from Bard College and Miami Dade College.

Walker lives in Manhattan, New York with his partner, David Beitzel, a contemporary art dealer.

Darren Walker was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 26, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Darren Walker was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 26, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit executive and foundation president Darren Walker (1959 -) was named tenth president of the Ford Foundation in 2013. He previously served as COO of the Abyssinian Development Corporation in Harlem, and as vice president for the Rockefeller Foundation's program initiatives.

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:

Walker, Darren, 1959-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Walker, Darren, 1959---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Foundation President

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Darren Walker, August 26, 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).

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 Darren Walker, Section A2014_170_001_001, TRT: 1:32:37 ?

Darren Walker was born on August 28, 1959 in Lafayette, Louisiana to Beulah Davis Spencer and Eugene Walker. His mother was raised in the rural town of Rayne, Louisiana, but attended high school in Houston, Texas where her aunt and other family members migrated. Walker did not have a relationship with his father. He recounts his earliest childhood memory and his childhood years in Ames, Texas, and then Baytown, Texas, home of a Humble Oil refinery. In Baytown, he attended Cedar Bayou Junior High School, and then Sterling High School. Walker also describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood. As a child, Walker spent a lot of time with his Aunt Ida and Uncle Warren because his mother worked a lot. An inquisitive and imaginative child, Walker imagined life outside of his own world, and was inspired by figures like Whitney Young that he encountered on the pages of Ebony and Jet magazines. Walker talks about his religious upbringing and his awareness of the Civil Rights Movement as a child.

Video Oral History Interview with Darren Walker, Section A2014_170_001_002, TRT: 2:32:30 ?

Darren Walker was instructed by several teachers who influenced him throughout his grade school years. At Sterling High School in Baytown, Texas, Walker was active in the student government, Key Club, and the cheerleading teams. He earned money by working in area restaurants. He also came to terms with his identity as a gay man. In 1978, Walker enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin where he was the head of the Texas Student Union and elected into the university's oldest honorary society, the Friar Society. He also had his first exposure to country clubs by his college suite mate. Walker's mentors at the University of Texas at Austin included Shirley Bird Perry, Susan Clagett, John Trimble and Roy Vaughan. After graduating in 1982, Walker spent a year in the office of Texas Governor Bill Clements. He then entered the University of Texas School of Law. Walker graduated in 1986 and entered the New York office of Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton where he had previously interned.

Video Oral History Interview with Darren Walker, Section A2014_170_001_003, TRT: 3:28:34 ?

Darren Walker practiced law at New York City's Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton from 1986 to 1988. While there, Walker realized that he did not enjoy the demanding lifestyle of large law firms. Walker's expanding social network led him to Ned O'Gorman of the Children's Storefront School, and to HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Calvin Butts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Walker describes social and cultural issues like AIDS and racial divisions, as well as political figures like Mayors Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani in New York City during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1988, he began working in asset-backed securities at the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS). Working at UBS allowed Walker to become more active civically, and he joined the board of the Children's Storefront School and of the New York City Ballet. In 1996, Walker became the COO of the Abyssinian Development Corporation, partnering with Karen Phillips and Reverend Calvin Butts to encourage the economic development of New York City's Harlem neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Darren Walker, Section A2014_170_001_004, TRT: 4:29:46 ?

Darren Walker was COO of Abyssinian Development Corporation from 1996 to 2002. With Karen Phillips and HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Calvin Butts. Walker worked toward economic development in New York City's Harlem. His work caught led to a recommendation from HistoryMaker Stacey Stewart to Gordon

Conway and Julio Lopez at the Rockefeller Foundation where he was hired as the domestic urban program head. In 2006, Walker became Rockefeller's vice president for foundation initiatives. In his career, Walker was supported by Dr. Johnnetta Cole, Ann Fudge, Franklin Thomas, and HistoryMakers Richard Parsons and Vernon Jordan. In 2010, Walker became a vice president at the Ford Foundation and succeeded the foundation's first African American president, Franklin Thomas, in 2013. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, and HistoryMakers Earl Lewis and La June Montgomery Tabron, were also black foundation presidents at the time of Walker's interview. Walker talks about the impact of President Bill Clinton's Harlem residency.

Video Oral History Interview with Darren Walker, Section A2014_170_001_005, TRT: 5:13:27 ?

Darren Walker succeeded Luis Ubinas as president of the Ford Foundation in 2013. Prior to his appointment, he was the foundation's vice president for Education, Creativity, and Free Expression. Walker highlights the foundation's focus on social justice and distinguishes between development foundations and social justice foundations. He also talks about the Ford Foundation's budget and the challenges facing the organization. Throughout his life, Walker was the beneficiary of several initiatives created or supported by the Ford Foundation including Head Start, Pell Grants, and public education. Walker concludes his interview by reflecting upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community as well as his own legacy.