

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Melissa Harris-Perry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harris-Perry, Melissa V. (Melissa Victoria), 1973-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Melissa Harris-Perry,
Dates:	September 12, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	4 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:59:28).
Abstract:	Television host and political science professor Melissa Harris-Perry (1973 -) is the host of MSNBC's "Melissa Harris-Perry" and the presidential chair professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University. She founded the Anna Julia Cooper Project on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South and has authored two books: Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought, and Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America. Harris-Perry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 12, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_203
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Television host and political science professor Melissa Victoria Harris-Perry was born on October 2, 1973 in Seattle, Washington. Her father, William M. Harris, Sr., was the first dean of African American Affairs at the University of Virginia; her mother, Diana Gray, primarily worked for nonprofit organizations, colleges,

and state government agencies. Harris-Perry was raised in both Charlottesville and Chesterfield County, Virginia, and attended Thomas Dale High School. She received her B.A. degree in English from Wake Forest University in 1994 and her Ph.D. degree in political science from Duke University in 1999. She also studied theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Harris-Perry first taught at the University of Chicago, and then as an associate professor in the department of Politics at Princeton University. In 2011, she was hired as a professor of political science at Tulane University, where she also founded the Anna Julia Cooper Project on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South. In 2012, she became host of “Melissa Harris-Perry” on MSNBC. In July of 2014, Harris-Perry returned to her alma mater, Wake Forest University, where she was named the presidential chair professor of politics and international affairs. She also directs the Anna Julia Cooper Center at Wake Forest University.

Harris-Perry’s 2004 book, *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*, won the 2005 W. E. B. Du Bois Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and 2005 Best Book Award from the Race and Ethnic Politics Section of the American Political Science Association. She released her second book, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, in 2011. She has also been published in scholarly journals and edited volumes, and authored a monthly column entitled “Sister Citizen” for *The Nation* magazine.

In 2009, Harris-Perry became the youngest scholar to deliver the W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures at Harvard University. Also, in 2009, she delivered the prestigious Ware Lecture, becoming the youngest woman to ever do so. Harris-Perry served as a trustee of The Century Foundation and sat on the advisory board for Chef's Move!. She has received honorary doctorate degrees from Meadville Lombard Theological School and Eckerd College.

Harris-Perry is married to James Perry, and is the mother of two daughters, Parker and Anna James.

Melissa Harris-Perry was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 12, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Melissa Harris-Perry was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on September 12, 2014, in New York, New York, and

was recorded on 4 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television host and political science professor Melissa Harris-Perry (1973 -) is the host of MSNBC's "Melissa Harris-Perry" and the presidential chair professor of politics and international affairs at Wake Forest University. She founded the Anna Julia Cooper Project on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South and has authored two books: *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET: Everyday Talk and Black Political Thought*, and *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*.

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:

Harris-Perry, Melissa V. (Melissa Victoria), 1973-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Feldman, Isaac (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Harris-Perry, Melissa V. (Melissa Victoria), 1973---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Television Host

Political Science Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers|EducationMakers

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 Melissa Harris-Perry, September 12, 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 Melissa Harris-Perry, Section A2014_203_001_001, TRT: 1:28:47 2014/09/12

Melissa Harris-Perry was born on October 2, 1973 in Seattle, Washington. Her mother, Diana Gray, who is Caucasian, was born in San Francisco, California in 1943 into a Mormon family. Her mother attended Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah; and in 1964, she married and gave birth to her daughter Elizabeth. After divorcing, Gray enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington where she met William M. Harris, Harris-Perry's father, who was born in Richmond, Virginia in October of 1941. His father was William M. Harris, Sr., his mother was Rosa Harris, and his twin brother is HistoryMaker Wesley Harris. He attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he married Kathy

Branch (ph.) and had three children. He later enrolled at the University of Washington. In 1976, Diana Gray, Harris, Branch, and all of their children moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, where Harris was Dean of African American Affairs at the University of Virginia. Harris-Perry was raised as a Unitarian Universalist.

Video Oral History Interview with Melissa Harris-Perry, Section A2014_203_001_002, TRT: 2:28:58 2014/09/12

Melissa Harris-Perry talks about her family's dynamics during her childhood, including the relationships between her mother, Diana Gray, and father, William M. Harris, Sr., and between her mother and her godmother, Kathy Branch (ph.). Harris-Perry was raised with by her mother as if in a single parent household, but lived near her father's family in Charlottesville, Virginia and treated his children as her siblings. Harris-Perry reflects on growing up in an interracial family and the racism her white sister, Elizabeth, and mother experienced on her behalf. She also talks about her relationship with her father and the values that she learned from him. Harris-Perry attended Jackson Via Elementary School in Charlottesville, Virginia. When she was in sixth grade, Harris-Perry moved to Petersburg, Virginia and her mother's romantic relationship with her father ended. She also recalls the teachers who influenced her, including Emma Knight (ph.), Roberta Teague (ph.), Mrs. Erickson (ph.), and Mr. Ramzire (ph.).

Video Oral History Interview with Melissa Harris-Perry, Section A2014_203_001_003, TRT: 3:31:05 2014/09/12

Melissa Harris-Perry attended Thomas Dale High School in Chester, Virginia, where her teachers included Mr. Ramzire (ph.) and Mr. Spain (ph.), a conservative social studies teacher. She also talks about her career aspirations. In 1990, Harris-Perry left high school early and was accepted on a full scholarship into Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Her professors included Dolly McPherson and HistoryMaker Maya Angelou. Harris-Perry joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, founded the Nia House on campus, and was politically active. After receiving her B.A. degree in 1994 from Wake Forest University, Harris-Perry enrolled at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina to study

public policy, but then entered its Ph.D. program in political science. She received her Ph.D. degree in 1999 after writing a dissertation on intraparty political differences within the black community. Harris-Perry reflects on how her feminism and experience as a rape survivor reshaped her views as a black nationalism.

Video Oral History Interview with Melissa Harris-Perry, Section A2014_203_001_004, TRT: 4:30:38 2014/09/12

Melissa Harris-Perry talks about being raped as a high school student by a neighbor and not telling her mother at the time. She also talks about her best friend, the historian Dr. Blair Kelley. In 1999, Harris-Perry married her first husband, Dennis Lacewell, and moved to Chicago, Illinois to be an assistant professor at the University of Chicago. There, she met Cathy Cohen and Michael Dawson, and served on the board for the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. In 2004, Harris-Perry published her first book and became a popular media commentator for the U.S. Senate race in Illinois between HistoryMaker Barack Obama and Alan Keyes. In 2005, Harris-Perry divorced her first husband; and then, in 2006, she left Chicago to become a tenured professor at Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey where she wrote her second book and attended Union Theological Seminary in New York City, New York. In 2010, she married James Perry and began teaching at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana.