

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gordon J. Davis

PERSON

Davis, Gordon J.

**Alternative Names:** Gordon J. Davis;

**Life Dates:** August 7, 1941-

**Place of Birth:** Chicago, Illinois, USA

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Work:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Lawyer; Civic Leader

## Biographical Note

Lawyer and civic leader Gordon J. Davis was born on August 7, 1941, in Chicago, Illinois to William Allison Davis and Elizabeth Stubbs Davis. Davis grew up near a predominantly African American neighborhood, where he gained a passion for jazz and the arts. He graduated from Williams College in 1963 with his B.A. degree, and then from Harvard Law School in 1967 with his J.D. degree.

Upon graduation, Davis moved to New York City and worked as special assistant to Mayor John Lindsay. He served on the New York City Planning Commission from 1973 until 1978, when he was appointed New York City's first African American commissioner of Parks and Recreation. During his service as commissioner, Davis was instrumental in the founding of the Central Park Conservancy. In 1983, Davis resigned as commissioner of Parks and Recreation and joined the law firm of Lord, Day & Lord. He began serving as counsel to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that same year. In 1990, he became the founding chairman of Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Davis was named partner at the law firm of LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae in 1994, but left in 2001 when he was voted the first African American president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Davis held this position for nine months before returning to LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae as a senior partner. In 2002, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the organization overseeing the redevelopment of the Ground Zero site, became his client. Davis was named partner at Dewey & LeBoeuf in 2007, after a merger joined LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae and Dewey Ballantine. In 2012, he moved to Venable, LLP as a partner. Davis' clients have included the New York Public Library, Mt. Sinai Medical Center, the United States Tennis Association, and the American Museum of Natural History.

Davis has served on the board of directors of the Municipal Art Society of New York as well as other civic and arts organizations in New York City. In 2001, he was honored by 100 Black Men for his public service, and was named one of "America's Top Black Lawyers" by Black Enterprise magazine the following year. He was appointed to a six-year term on the board of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts by President Barack Obama in 2010.

Davis lives in New York City with his wife, and has one daughter.

Gordon J. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 17, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Francis W. Parker High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Hyde Park Academy High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Williams College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**A.B.**

**Columbia University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**No Degree, M.A. Candidate**

**Harvard Law School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**J.D.**

**Mayor's Office, New York City** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1967 to 1973]

**Assistant to the Mayor**

**New York City Planning Commission** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to 1978]

**Commissioner - 1 of 7, Member of the  
Commission**

[EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to 1978]

**Associate**

**New York City Parks Department** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1978 to 1983]

**Commissioner of Parks**

**Lord Day & Lord** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1983 to 1994]

**Partner**

**LeBoeuf Lamb / Dewey LeBoeuf** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1994 to 2012]

**Partner**

**Lincoln Center Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2001 to 2001]

**President**

**Venable LLP** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2012 to 2014]

**Partner**

**Phoenix Companies, Inc.** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Consolidated Edison** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**New York Magazine, Inc.** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Dreyfus Inc.** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Central Park Conservancy** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Founder and Life Trustee**

**Jazz at Lincoln Center** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Founding Chairman and Member of the Board**

**Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.**

[MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**President**

**Studio Museum in Harlem** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**New York Public Library** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**New York Public Theater** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts** [MEMBEROF]

[from 2010 to ?]

**Board Member**