

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George C. Wolfe

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wolfe, George C.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George C. Wolfe,
Dates:	November 9, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	2 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:13:26).
Abstract:	Playwright and artistic director George C. Wolfe (1954 -) was resident director and, later, producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival. He is known for directing Broadway productions of Jelly's Last Jam, and Angels in America. Wolfe was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 9, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_127
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Playwright and artistic director George C. Wolfe was born on September 23, 1954 in Frankfort, Kentucky. His mother, a teacher, was among the first African Americans to study library science through the University of Kentucky Extension Program. Wolfe's mother became the principal at the private, all-black, Rosenwald Laboratory School, where Wolfe received his elementary education, and discovered an interest in staging and directing. As a teenager, Wolfe attended a summer theater workshop at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and began directing plays. He graduated from Frankfort High School in 1972, where he

wrote for the literary journal. Wolfe attended Kentucky State University in Frankfort but, in 1973, transferred to Pomona College in Claremont, California, graduating in 1976 with his B.A. degree in theater.

Wolfe wrote and directed his first play, *Up for Grabs*, in 1975. In *Up for Grabs*, Wolfe debuted his sketch framing technique and the motif of passage through doors, which became common elements in his later works. The following year, he premiered *Block Party*. Wolfe completed a six-month postgraduate artist residency at Pomona College before meeting C. Bernard Jackson, who funded the first production of Wolfe's *Tribal Rites* at the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles. Wolfe staged several plays in Los Angeles before moving to New York in 1979, where he graduated with his M.F.A. degree in 1983 from New York University School of the Arts. He premiered *Paradise!* in 1985, and *The Colored Museum* in 1986, which garnered Wolfe national attention, as well as the attention of New York Shakespeare Festival founder Joseph Papp. Following the premiere of *Spunk* (1989), Papp named Wolfe a resident director in 1990. Wolfe won his first Obie award for *Spunk*'s New York production that same year. In 1992, Wolfe made his Broadway debut with *Jelly's Last Jam* at the Virginia Theatre, and achieved widespread recognition when he directed the Broadway premiere of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* in 1993. He was named producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival that year and went on to produce ten seasons. Wolfe also directed the 1997 world premiere of *Amistad* at the Lyric Opera in Chicago, Illinois. He staged *Shuffle Along, or The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* at the Music Box Theatre in New York City in 2016.

In 1975, Wolfe won the Pacific Southern Regional Award for playwriting at the American College Theater Festival for *Up for Grabs*. The following year, he premiered *Block Party*, receiving the Pacific Southern Regional Award for playwriting a second year in a row.

George C. Wolfe was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 9, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George C. Wolfe was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on November 9, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 2 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Playwright and artistic director George C. Wolfe (1954 -) was resident director and, later, producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival. He is known for directing Broadway productions of *Jelly's Last Jam*, and *Angels 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:

Wolfe, George C.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Playwright

Artistic Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|ArtMakers

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 C. Wolfe, November 9, 2016. 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 George C. Wolfe, Section
A2016_127_001_001, TRT: 1:36:37 2016/11/09

George C. Wolfe was born on September 23, 1954 in Frankfort, Kentucky to Anna Lindsey Wolfe and Costello Wolfe. His paternal great-grandparents, Mary Wolfe and Sam Wolfe, were born into slavery. After emancipation, the family settled in Providence, Kentucky, where Wolfe's paternal great-uncle, Sullivan Wolfe, was later murdered while trying to organize an integrated coal miners' union. Wolfe's paternal grandmother, Eura Hale Wolfe, was born into a large, landowning family in Christian County, Kentucky, and later married carpenter George Wolfe. When Wolfe's father was a young boy, his family moved from Hopkinsville, Kentucky to Muncie, Indiana. Wolfe's mother was born in Frankfort, and was raised by her mother, Addie Parker President, and stepfather, John Lindsey. Wolfe grew up in a tight knit community in Frankfort, where his mother worked as an educator. He attended church services at First Baptist Church, and was taught at Rosenwald Laboratory School at Kentucky State College.

Video Oral History Interview with George C. Wolfe, Section
A2016_127_001_002, TRT: 2:36:49 2016/11/09

George C. Wolfe grew up with two older and two younger

siblings in Frankfort, Kentucky. There, he attended the Rosenwald Laboratory School. At twelve years old, he accompanied his mother, Annie Lindsey Wolfe, to New York City, where she pursued an advanced degree in education at New York University. At that time, he saw Broadway performances of 'West Side Story,' which spurred his interest in theater. A sensitive child, he developed more confidence by the time he entered Frankfort High School, where he was a newspaper editor, head of the literary magazine club and a drum major. During the summer of his sophomore year, Wolfe participated in a theater program in Oxford, Ohio, where his mother completed her doctoral studies at Miami University. Upon graduating from high school in 1972, he attended Kentucky State University in Frankfort for a year. Disillusioned by the conservativeness of his hometown, Wolfe decided to transfer to the theater department at Pomona College in Claremont, California.