

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Walker, Andre
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker,
Dates:	March 6, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:33:19).
Abstract:	Hairstylist Andre Walker (1956 -) was the personal hairstylist for Oprah Winfrey, founder of Andrew Walker Hair, LLC and developed The Andre Walker Hair Typing System. Walker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 6, 2017, in Miami, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_036
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Hairstylist Andre Walker was born on October 19, 1956 in Chicago, Illinois to Woodrow Walker and Fanny Walker. He attended Kohn Elementary School and Lindbloom Math and Science Academy in Chicago, Illinois and graduated from there in 1974. Walker earned his certificate in cosmetology from the Pivot Point Academy in Bloomingdale, Illinois in 1977.

After graduating from cosmetology school, Walker was mentored by Chicago-stylist Leigh Jones and began working as a hair stylist for the beauty salon at the I. Magnin & Company department store on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, under the leadership of stylist Rudi Hooker. In 1980, he established his own studio, the Andre Walker Salon, which he operated until 1987. Walker then joined Harpo Productions as a hair stylist in 1985, and worked as Oprah Winfrey's personal hair stylist for her many television appearances and for every cover of *O, The Oprah Magazine* until 2015. Walker also styled the hair of former First Lady Michelle Obama, former First Lady Barbara Bush, and was credited with creating Academy Award winning actress Halle Berry's signature short pixie haircut. In 2013, Walker and Dianne Hudson, Oprah Winfrey's executive producer, founded Andre Walker Hair LLC. Two years later, the company launched a new hair care system for naturally textured hair, called The Gold System, as well as The Andre Walker Hair Typing System. Walker also served as an industry advisor to select fashion and trade media outlets, promoting hair care science and education. In addition to his career in the hair care industry, Walker also published *Andre Talks Hair!* in 1997. Walker has been the recipient of several awards, including seven Daytime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Hairstyling for his work on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and was nominated fourteen times for the award. In 2008, Pivot Point Academy awarded him the L.E.O. Award, which honored the achievements of beauty professionals influenced by school founder Leo Passage. The following year, Walker received the Thurgood Marshall Fashion Icon Award. In 2016, he was presented the Bronner Bros Industry Icon Award as well.

Andre Walker was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 6, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Andre Walker was conducted by Harriette Cole on March 6, 2017, in Miami, Florida, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Hairstylist Andre Walker (1956 -) was the personal hairstylist for Oprah Winfrey, founder of Andrew Walker Hair, LLC and developed The Andre Walker Hair Typing System.

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, Andre

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Walker, Andre--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Hair Stylist

HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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 Andre Walker, March 6, 2017. 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 Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_001, TRT: 1:28:51 ?

Andre Walker was born on October 19, 1956 in Chicago, Illinois to Fannie Benson Walker and Woodrow Walker, Sr. His mother was born in Hazlehurst, Mississippi and never knew her father, who was white. She was raised by her mother, Ellen Benson, and completed her high school diploma. Walker's father was born in 1918 to sharecroppers in Jackson, Mississippi. He taught elementary school prior to the late 1940s, when he married Walker's mother and moved to Chicago. Many of Walker's paternal relatives also moved to Chicago, where they worked with his father at the post office. Walker occasionally visited his grandparents in Mississippi, and his father often talked about the prevalence of

lynching in the South. When Walker was five years old, his family moved from the North Side of Chicago to a mixed race community on the South Side, where he enrolled at Alfred D. Kohn Elementary School. By the time that Walker graduated from Robert Lindblom Technical High School, the neighborhood was predominantly African American.

Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_002, TRT: 2:31:40 ?

Andre Walker was one of a few black students when he began his education at Alfred D. Kohn Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. He was initially bullied for his race, but that changed as the school became predominantly African American. From an early age, Walker enjoyed styling his mother's wigs, and he established a small haircutting business during his teenage years. Walker tested into Robert Lindblom Technical High School, but struggled academically and left the school during his senior year. In the mid-1970s, he entered a hairstyling competition hosted by Pivot Point International, and won a scholarship to attend the company's beauty school. Although the curriculum almost exclusively focused on white hair, Walker had the opportunity to learn about relaxers from Olive Lee Benson. He was also mentored by Leigh Jones, who helped him become Rudy Hooker's assistant at I. Magnin. After six months, Hooker was recruited to work at Saks Fifth Avenue, and Walker was promoted to stylist at I. Magnin.

Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_003, TRT: 3:31:42 ?

Andre Walker worked for several years at the I. Magnin Salon in Chicago, Illinois. Then, he partnered with Cheryl Jackson to start his own salon, Headlines. The business was short lived, and Walker founded his next salon independently. Upon learning that Oprah Winfrey was seeking a new stylist, Walker offered his services and obtained a recommendation from a former colleague who worked for Winfrey at the time. After being hired as Winfrey's personal hair stylist, Walker often traveled with her, and closed his salon as her celebrity grew. At this point, Walker talks about Oprah Winfrey's hair styles. He sought to keep her style current, but not overly fashion forward. He used weaves and custom wigs to protect her hair from heat damage, and often designed curly and braided styles for Winfrey, who helped natural African American hair become more widely accepted. Walker traveled internationally with Winfrey, and occasionally appeared on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' to give hair advice and makeovers.

Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_004, TRT: 4:29:41 ?

Andre Walker was outed as gay to his parents, Fannie Benson Walker and Woodrow Walker, Sr., when he was in his early twenties. They initially disapproved, but came to accept his sexuality. Around this time, the AIDS crisis began, and Walker's mentor, Rudy Hooker, passed away. After several years as Oprah Winfrey's personal hairstylist, Walker began working for Halle Berry as well. He cut her hair very short, which was unorthodox for women in Hollywood at the time. Due to the demands of celebrity schedules, he only styled her hair for a few years before returning to focus solely on Winfrey. Over his career, Walker won seven Emmy Awards for hairstyling on 'The Oprah Winfrey Show.' In 1997, he published 'Andre Talks Hair!' The book introduced the Andre Walker Hair Typing System, which classified hair by texture instead of race, making it easier to talk about hair care methods. After years of interior decorating for friends, Walker and his partner, David Simmons, launched Walker Simmons Designs in 2005.

Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_005, TRT: 5:26:21 ?

Andre Walker developed a close relationship with Oprah Winfrey during his

thirty-year career as her personal hairstylist. He often collaborated with her creative director, Adam Glassman, and makeup artist, Reggie Wells, to develop Winfrey's new looks. After Winfrey retired from 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' in 2011, Walker continued working with her on the Oprah Winfrey Network. He announced his retirement as her personal stylist in 2015. Afterwards, Walker partnered with Dianne Hudson, who was the executive producer of 'The Oprah Winfrey Show.' Together, they created a product line for natural hair called The Gold System. Walker had often mixed his own products to moisturize and style Winfrey's hair, and used this expertise to create the hair care line. The Gold System launched in Target stores nationwide in 2013, and went on to be sold on Amazon.com as well. Walker traveled to promote the line, and planned to eventually sell the company.

Video Oral History Interview with Andre Walker, Section A2017_036_001_006, TRT: 6:05:04 ?

Andre Walker reflects upon his life and legacy, and his contribution to Oprah Winfrey's career. He concludes the interview by sharing his advice to aspiring hair stylists.