

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ida E. Lewis

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Lewis, Ida E., 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ida E. Lewis,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 6, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:40:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Journalist Ida E. Lewis (1934 - ) was the second editor-in-chief of <i>Essence</i> magazine and the first female editor-in-chief of <i>The Crisis</i> . She also founded <i>Encore</i> magazine, and reported on international news throughout the world. Lewis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 6, 2017, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_216
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Ida E. Lewis was born on September 22, 1934 in Malvern, Pennsylvania to Grace Walker Lewis and Samuel Lewis. She graduated from Swarthmore High School in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania in 1952. Then, she earned her bachelor's degree in public relations and journalism from Boston University in 1956.

Lewis began her career as a reporter at the New York Amsterdam News in 1957. Later, she was hired at the African American-owned newspaper *The New York Age*, where she stayed until 1961. After leaving *The New York Age*, she worked as a director of research at Small Investors Real Estate Plan, Inc. Then, Lewis moved to Paris, France, where she lived for six years. During that time, she worked as a contributing writer for publications including *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro Littéraire* and *Jeune Afrique*. She also interviewed African dignitaries for the British Broadcasting Corporation; reported from Africa on assignment with *Life* magazine; and wrote her first essay collection, *The Deep Ditch and The Narrow Pit*. In 1969, Lewis returned to the United States as a correspondent for *Jeune Afrique*. The following year, she became the second editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine. In 1971, Lewis left *Essence*, and founded the international news publication *Encore*, where she and Nikki Giovanni interviewed Biafran leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. Following the magazine's closure in 1979, Lewis joined the faculty of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Lewis worked from the mid-1980s as a political media consultant and press agent for clients such as Ross Perot, Abraham Hirschfeld and Adam Clayton Powell IV. In the 1990s, Lewis became the first female editor-in-chief of the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine. She also then began teaching as an adjunct professor of journalism at the Boston University College of Communication, where in 2005, she created the Ida E. Lewis Scholarship Fund to support minority students in journalism.

During her career, Lewis published several articles, including "Black Mask of Angry Africa" in *Life* magazine; "The End of Integrationism: Neither Assimilation, nor Secession, Black Americans Engage in a New Way" in *Jeune Afrique*; and "Who Is an African American" in *The New Crisis*.

Lewis was the recipient of the Award for Excellence in Journalism from the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. She also received the Woman of Distinction Award from the Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York.

In 2004, Lewis was appointed to serve on the Dean's Executive Advisory Board of the Boston University College of Communication. She also served on the Boston University Alumni Council and the Boston University College of Communication's National Alumni Committee.

Ida E. Lewis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 6, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ida E. Lewis was conducted by Harriette Cole on December 6, 2017, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist Ida E. Lewis (1934 - ) was the second editor-in-chief of *Essence* magazine and the first female editor-in-chief of *The Crisis*. She also founded *Encore* magazine, and reported on international news throughout the world.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Lewis, Ida E., 1934-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Lewis, Ida E., 1934- --Interviews

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**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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**Occupations:**

Journalist

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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**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 Ida E. Lewis, December 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).

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**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.

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**Detailed Description of the Collection**

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Ida E. Lewis, Section A2017\_216\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:28 ?

Ida E. Lewis was born on September 22, 1934 in Malvern, Pennsylvania to Grace Walker Lewis and Samuel Lewis. Lewis' maternal grandfather, Hiliary Walker, served in World War I, and was left with breathing difficulties after a gas attack. He spent long periods in treatment at the Coatesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center, although he left occasionally to visit Lewis' grandmother, Ida Walker, in Paoli, Pennsylvania, where Lewis' mother was born. Lewis' paternal grandparents, Samuel Lewis and Irene Lewis, moved to Paoli from Savannah, Georgia. After marrying, Lewis' parents raised six children in the suburban community of Morton, Pennsylvania. There, her mother owned a staffing agency, while her father worked at the Sun Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. Lewis began her education at the Phyllis Wheatley School in Morton. She graduated from Swarthmore High School, where she developed an interest in history. Lewis went on to study public relations and journalism at Boston University.

Video Oral History Interview with Ida E. Lewis, Section A2017\_216\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:13 ?

Ida E. Lewis enrolled in 1952 at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts, where she pledged to the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. Upon graduating, she became a part time reporter for the New York Amsterdam News under James Hicks and C.B. Powell. Later, Lewis secured a full time position at a black newspaper called the New York Age. She often conflicted with her manager, who eventually attempted to dismiss her. A few months later, Lewis accepted a position at the Small Investors Real Estate Plan, Inc. Then, following a friend's advice, Lewis took a vacation to Paris, France, and remained there for six years. During that time, she worked as a contributing writer for Le Monde, Le Figaro Litteraire, Jeune Afrique and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). She also wrote her first book, 'The Deep Ditch and The Narrow Pit,' and reported from Africa on assignment with Life magazine. In 1969, Lewis returned to the United States, where she became the editor-in-chief of Essence magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Ida E. Lewis, Section A2017\_216\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:24 ?

Ida E. Lewis lived in Paris, France for most of the 1960s. During that time, she became acquainted with African American artists like Melvin Van Peebles, and wrote for the magazine Jeune Afrique. In 1970, Lewis became the second editor-in-chief of Essence magazine. She successfully operated the magazine, but became increasingly frustrated by the conflict between the publication's founders, Edward Lewis, Clarence Smith, Cecil Hollingsworth and Jonathan Blount. Eventually, Lewis was replaced by Marcia Ann Gillespie. In 1971, Lewis founded the international news publication Encore, where she interviewed Biafran leader Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu with Nikki Giovanni. The magazine closed in 1979, and Lewis began teaching at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. From 1984, Lewis worked as a speechwriter and consultant for politicians like Ross Perot, Abraham Hirschfeld and Adam Clayton Powell IV. At this point, Lewis talks about the differences in political privilege based on family legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Ida E. Lewis, Section A2017\_216\_001\_004, TRT: 4:15:58 ?

Ida E. Lewis became the editor-in-chief of the NAACP's The Crisis magazine during the 1990s. Around this time, she also began teaching as an adjunct professor of journalism at the Boston University College of Communication. Following her retirement, Lewis travelled abroad in Africa and developed a large collection of black art and memorabilia. At this point, she shares her advice to journalists of color, and describes her hopes and concerns for the

African American community. Lewis reflects upon her life and legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.