

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dawoud Bey

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bey, Dawoud, 1953-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey,
Dates:	January 12, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:02:19).
Abstract:	Photographer Dawoud Bey (1953 -) has his work displayed permanently in museums and galleries around the world and is known for his portraits of African Americans and other historically marginalized groups. Bey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 12, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_003
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dawoud Bey was born as David Edward Smikle on November 25, 1953, in the Jamaica neighborhood of Queens, New York. Bey received a BFA in Photography from Empire State College in 1990 and then later finished his masters degree at the Yale University School of Art.

At the age of fifteen, Bey was given his first 35 mm camera. However, his prestigious career as a photographer did not begin until 1975. Inspired particularly by the photographer James VanDerZee, featured in the exhibition "Harlem on My Mind," Bey began exploring with documentary style photographic techniques. The resulting series of black and white photographs, Bey's "Harlem, USA" collection, chronicled urban life in the famous African American community and was later exhibited at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1979.

Bey has experimented with many innovative approaches and photographic traditions. Whatever his technique, he uses his artwork as a platform to challenge stereotypical images of African Americans and other historically marginalized groups. Since 1992, Bey has completed a number of collaborative projects, working with young people, museums and cultural institutions to broaden the participation of various communities whose voices have often been absent in these institutions

He has had numerous exhibitions worldwide, at such institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago, the National Portrait Gallery in London, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, where his works were also included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial. The Walker Art Center organized a mid-career survey of his work in 1995 that traveled to institutions throughout the United States and Europe. Bey's works are included in the permanent collections of numerous museums around the world. He is currently a professor of photography at Columbia College in Chicago, Illinois.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dawoud Bey was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 12, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Dawoud Bey (1953 -) has his work displayed permanently in museums and galleries around the world and is known for his portraits of African Americans and other historically marginalized groups.

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:

Bey, Dawoud, 1953-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bey, Dawoud, 1953---Interviews

African American photographers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Migration, Internal--New York (State)--New York.

Jamaica (New York, N.Y.).

Teacher-student relationships--New York (State)--New York.

Discrimination in education--New York (State)--New York.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)--Exhibitions.

VanDerZee, James, 1886-1983.

Evans, Walker, 1903-1975.

DeCarava, Roy.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006.

Photography, Artistic.

Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.).

Art--Philosophy.

Aesthetics.

Alvarez, Candida, 1955-.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Photographer

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Dawoud Bey, January 12, 2001. 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 Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_001, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Dawoud Bey shares his family history and background in the opening segments. He continues with the various hardships his parents faced in the 1920s and 1930s and their courtship. Bey describes his childhood in Jamaica, Queens and the rapid acceleration of 'white flight' in his neighborhood. A bright and calm place in this storm of change was his second grade teacher, Hortense Jones. Her kind manner and encouraging philosophy played a major role in Bey's life.

African American photographers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Migration, Internal--New York (State)--New York.

Jamaica (New York, N.Y.).

Teacher-student relationships--New York (State)--New York.

Discrimination in education--New York (State)--New York.

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VanDerZee, James, 1886-1983.

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DeCarava, Roy.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006.

Photography, Artistic.

Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.).

Art--Philosophy.

Aesthetics.

Alvarez, Candida, 1955-

Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_002, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Dawoud Bey recalls his contentious secondary school years where busing and integration had a decided impact on his worldview. The encouragement he found with his second grade teacher was supplanted by suspicion and accusations of white teachers who questioned young Bey's intellectual ability. Bey recalls how a serendipitous bequest from his late godfather of a camera turned his life around. He also notes the pivotal influence of the controversial Metropolitan Museum exhibit, Harlem on My Mind, on his philosophy and photography.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_003, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

Dawoud Bey charts his movement from a musician to a professional photographer. After attending the Queensborough Community College, Bey decided to invest in his education and attend the School of Visual Arts in New York City. After 2 years, his professors encouraged him to make the leap into a professional career. Several small exhibits later, Bey landed a plum solo exhibition at the Studio Museum of Harlem with his works entitled, 'Harlem, USA'. The Studio Museum plays a pivotal role in Bey's artistic growth and career he explains. As a new artist, Bey details the influence of noted photographers like James VanDerZee or Walker Evans on his work.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_004, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Dawoud Bey shares insider details of life as an artist and photographer in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He describes the influence of noted photographer, Roy DeCarava and Gordon Parks on his work. In particular, he credits DeCarava's blunt style and critiques of Bey's photography in sharpening his work. Bey also speaks at length about the strong ties forged among other black artists in New York in the 1970s and 1980s. He found no line of demarcation between painters, sculptors and photographers. Rather, the fertile creative soil helped bonds of friendship grow. Bey remembers his first major solo exhibit, 'Harlem, USA' and the creative process behind his work.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_005, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

Dawoud Bey gives great detail on his creative process and the forces which motivate his photography. From his travels to the work of other artists and photographers, Bey draws inspiration. He also recalls his courtship and marriage to painter Candida Alvarez.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawoud Bey, Section A2001_003_001_006, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Dawoud Bey gives a great deal of insight into his creative process and philosophy of art. Although he was a successful artist in the early 1990s, Bey decided to attend Yale for a graduate degree in photography. Not long after, he moved to Chicago, Illinois to accept a position as a professor of photography after his wife landed a position at the School of the Art Institute. Bey continues to offer his assessment of the future of black artists and the influence of politics on art. He describes the impact of the Studio Museum of Harlem on black artists and on his career as well. He isn't ready to contemplate his legacy; Bey says there are a few more chapters left to write. The segment closes with several photos.