

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kalamu ya Salaam

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Salaam, Kalamu ya, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kalamu ya Salaam,
Dates:	November 14, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:03:20).
Abstract:	Poet and music critic Kalamu ya Salaam (1947 -) was born Val Ferdinand III. He founded BLACKARTSOUTH and Ahidiana Work Study Center. He is senior partner of Bright Moments, a public relations firm. He is also the founder of WordBand, a poetry performance group; the NOMMO Literary Society; and Runagate Press. Salaam has written seven books of poetry. Salaam was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 14, 2002, in New Orleans, Louisiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_205
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Poet, editor, music producer and arts administrator, Kalamu ya Salaam was born Val Ferdinand III in New Orleans on March 24, 1947. Inspired by the poetry of Langston Hughes and the civil rights movement in New Orleans, Salaam became interested in writing and organizing for social change. Graduating from high school in 1964, he joined the U.S. Army and served in Korea. After service, Salaam attended Carleton College but returned to New Orleans in 1968 to earn an associate's degree from Delgado College.

During the Black Arts Movement, Salaam was a member of John O'Neal's Free Southern Theater for five years and was a founder of BLACKARTSOUTH. Changing his name along the way to Kalamu Ya Salaam, which is Kiswahili for "pen of peace," he was a founder of Ahidiana Work Study Center. He also assumed the editorship of the *Black Collegian* magazine, a post he held from 1970 to 1983. Salaam published cultural and political essays in *Black World*, *Black Scholar* and *Black Books Bulletin*. In 1977, he was part of the first African American activist delegation to the People's Republic of China.

Today, he is senior partner of Bright Moments, a public relations firm. He is also the founder of WordBand, a poetry performance group; the NOMMO Literary Society, and Runagate Press. Salaam has written seven books of poetry. His play, *"The Breath of Life"*, was honored by Louisiana State University, and *"BLK Love Song #1"* won a Best of Fringe Award from *The Manchester Evening News* in England. A respected music writer and critic, he is the arts and entertainment editor for *The New Orleans Tribune* and is a regular contributor to *Wavelength*, *The Louisiana Weekly* and *The New Orleans Music Magazine*. He was executive director of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival for many years, and produced "A NATION OF POETS" for the National Black Arts Festival.

Selected Bibliography

Salaam, Kalamu ya. What is Life? Reclaiming the Black Blues Self. Third World Press: Chicago, 1994.

-----Tarzan Can - Not Return to Africa But I Can (1996)

-----He's The Prettiest: A Tribute to Big Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana's 50 Years of Mardi Gras Indian Suiting. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1997.

-----360° A Revolution Of Black Poets. Alexandria, Va.: Black Words; New Orleans: Runagate Press, 1998.

-----Magic of Juju: An Appreciation of the Black Arts Movement. Third World Press: Chicago, 1998.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kalamu ya Salaam was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 14, 2002, in New Orleans, Louisiana, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet and music critic Kalamu ya Salaam (1947 -) was born Val Ferdinand III. He founded BLACKARTSOUTH and Ahidiana Work Study Center. He is senior partner of Bright Moments, a public relations firm. He is also the founder of WordBand, a poetry performance group; the NOMMO Literary Society; and Runagate Press. Salaam has written seven books of poetry.

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:

Salaam, Kalamu ya, 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Salaam, Kalamu ya, 1947- --Interviews

African American poets--Interviews

Music critics--Interviews

Periodical editors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Poet

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 Kalamu ya Salaam, November 14, 2002. 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 Kalamu ya Salaam, Section A2002_205_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20
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Kalamu ya Salaam was born Vallery Ferdinand III on March 24, 1947 in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Vallery Ferdinand, Jr., from Donaldsonville, Louisiana, and Inola Copelin Ferdinand, from Violet, Louisiana. His maternal grandfather, Noah Copelin, was a Baptist minister, and his paternal grandfather, Vallery Ferdinand, Sr., lived near Salaam in New Orleans. Salaam's father was an auto mechanic, but was not certified due to discrimination. His mother, a school teacher, taught at various schools across the city. Salaam grew up in New Orleans' rural Lower Ninth Ward. He grew up with two younger brothers, Kenneth Ferdinand and Keith C. Ferdinand, who is a successful cardiologist in New Orleans. Salaam and Keith were involved in militant Civil Rights activities as students, and Salaam left the NAACP and CORE in 1964, instead supporting SNCC while attending Carlton College in Minnesota. As a high school student, he read Langston Hughes and other African and African American authors, which shaped his own writing.

African American poets--Interviews.

Music critics--Interviews.

Periodical editors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Kalamu ya Salaam, Section A2002_205_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40
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Kalamu ya Salaam served in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1968, where he spent a year in Korea working on a missile site. He describes the sex industry surrounding the U.S. Army base. He and the other black soldiers rented a house called "Soulville" and created a safe place for the local women. Salaam also was stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, where he witnessed extreme poverty in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. After being discharged in 1968, Salaam wrote and performed with the Free Southern Theater, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Also that year, he attended Southern University in Louisiana, but was expelled because he was a leader of a militant student group. Salaam later met Robert Williams in China in 1977, and they aligned with the militant part of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1969, Salaam became executive director of the Lower Ninth Ward Health Center; and in 1970, he co-founded Black Collegian magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Kalamu ya Salaam, Section A2002_205_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00
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Kalamu ya Salaam traveled to China in 1977 as part of the first African American delegation. He also traveled around Africa, including Tanzania during the Sixth Pan-African Congress in 1974, and around the Caribbean, Central and South America, where he aligned himself with independence movements. Salaam described the development of his political ideology and his involvement with the Black Arts Movement. In 1970, he helped launch Black Collegian

magazine with Preston Edwards and became its managing editor, then he describes the renaissance of black publishing during the 1970s. Salaam was involved with the Congress of African People, attending the 1970 Atlanta, Georgia Conference where Amiri Baraka, Whitney Young, and HistoryMakers Louis Farrakhan and Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. united. He then describes group's split and its transition into a Marxist group, which is when he left. Salaam formed the community organization and publisher Ahidiana in 1977. He then reflects on changing his name.

Video Oral History Interview with Kalamu ya Salaam, Section A2002_205_001_004, TRT: 0:31:20
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In the 1970s, Kalamu ya Salaam was involved in the Black Arts Movement, and he reflects on his career as a writer and poet. Salaam's writing was influenced by Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Amiri Baraka, with whom Salaam developed a friendship. He authored 'What is Life? Reclaiming the Black Blues Self' in 1994, where he articulated his black nationalism and promoted the ideology of revolution instead of reform. Salaam reflects on the global capitalist movement and neoliberalism, as well as the anti-colonial and independence movements he aligned with. In 1974, he traveled to Tanzania where he met with President Julius Nyerere; and in 1977, he traveled to China. Salaam has also been involved in global independence movements, including revolutionary movements in Peru and Afghanistan, and he reflects on his developing ideology and politics. Salaam also talks about the Christianization of the Third World, and shares his concerns for the African American community, including the rising black prison population.