

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Curtis King

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	King, Curtis, 1951-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Curtis King,
Dates:	October 30, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:57:30).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive Curtis King (1951 -) is the founder of The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated, (TBAAL) of Dallas, the only African American multidisciplinary cultural arts organization housed inside a major urban convention center. King was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 30, 2004, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_222
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Curtis King, founder of The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated (TBAAL) of Dallas, Texas, was born December 20, 1951, in Coldwater, Mississippi; his father, Jonah King, was a farmer, and his mother, Elizabeth McGee King, was a schoolteacher. King graduated in 1969 from segregated Tate County High School where he enjoyed writing and acting in plays. At Jackson State University, King was mentored by poet Margaret Walker Alexander, who sent him to Chicago in 1972 for the historic Black Academy of Arts and Letters (BAAL) National Conference to Assess the State of Black Arts and Letters in the United States of America. At the conference King was not only inspired by John Oliver Killens, Harry Belafonte, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Romare Bearden, Alvin Ailey, Charles White, C. Eric Lincoln and others, but got their phone numbers as well.

Earning his master's degree in theater from Texas Christian University in 1974, King worked for the Mayor's Council on Youth Opportunity in Fort Worth, and the Sojourner Truth Theater Company after graduation. King was teaching theater at Shaw University in 1977 when he learned that the BAAL had gone defunct in 1976. Using \$250, King formed the Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters (later The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated, or TBAAL) in homage to BAAL in 1977. TBAAL went on to become the only African American multidisciplinary cultural arts organization housed inside a major urban convention center. TBAAL occupies 250,000 square feet of space in the Dallas Convention Center, and includes: the 1,750 seat Naomi Burton Theatre, Clarence Muse Cafe Theatre, James E. Kemp Art Gallery, and the Eva Jessye Gift Shop. TBAAL attracts hundreds of thousands of people annually.

Known for his artistic and administrative skills and celebrity contacts, King produced various celebrity tributes. King also produced the National Civil War Gala at Washington's Lincoln Theatre Center for the Performing Arts in 2000. King is the recipient of the Larry Leon Hamlin Producer's Award, Man of the Year Dream Makers Award, Esquire Magazine Register Award, the Dallas Historical Society's Arts Leadership Award, the Texas Ambassador of Goodwill Award and the World Peace Award in the Arts from the Interreligious and International Federation for

World Peace in 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Curtis King was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 30, 2004, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive Curtis King (1951 -) is the founder of The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated, (TBAAL) of Dallas, the only African American multidisciplinary cultural arts organization housed inside a major urban convention center.

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:

King, Curtis, 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

King, Curtis, 1951---Interviews

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Arts Administrator

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 Curtis King, October 30, 2004. 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 Curtis King, Section A2004_222_001_001, TRT: 0:28:00 ?
Curtis King was born on December 20, 1951 in Coldwater, Mississippi. His

mother, Elizabeth McGhee, was born in Tate County, Mississippi. King's maternal family were farmers; they owned land on which they had a gristmill, sorghum mill and cotton gin. King's maternal grandfather told stories about his father, who had married into a large family. His maternal grandparents demanded respects from whites in the area. King's mother attended Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs, Mississippi and worked as a teacher. She later earned an M.A. degree from the University of Mississippi in Oxford. King's father, Jonah King, was born in Tate County in the 1920s. His parents died young; he and his older siblings helped raise the younger ones. King's father served in the U.S. military during World War II before returning to the South, where he worked for an oil company, a rice company, and farmed the family's eighty acres of land. King recalls an early childhood memory of disobedience; he has three brothers.

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Curtis King, Section A2004_222_001_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Curtis King grew up in Coldwater, Mississippi where he ate maypop plants and listened to the music of the Caravans, Aretha Franklin, Duke Ellington and others. His family was not rich, but they were able to afford new bicycles for each of the four sons, a piano, and color television; they also took family trips, including one to Niagara Falls. King had piano lessons as a child, which aided him in high school as he learned to play the flute. During the Civil Rights era, he attended a speech by Fannie Lou Hamer. He entered the segregated Tate County Colored High School in Coldwater and graduated with honors in 1969. He was a popular student at Tate, and he developed an interest in theater by acting in school plays. King enrolled at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi, where he studied under poet Margaret Walker and was introduced to the Black Academy of Arts and Letters while attending The National Conference to Assess the State of Black Arts and Letters in the United States in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Curtis King, Section A2004_222_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Curtis King attended Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi during the time of the 1970 killings by the U.S. National Guard. He graduated in 1973. He enrolled in an M.A. program at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas where he wrote his thesis arguing that Lorraine Hansberry's 'A Raisin in the Sun' was rooted in black experience and earned his master's in theater in 1974. He worked in Fort Worth for two years then went to Raleigh, North Carolina to work in Shaw University's theater program for one year. During this time, King discovered that the original Black Academy of Arts and Letters had disbanded. After relocating to Dallas, Texas, King was gifted with several boxes of the organization's papers. King founded a theater company and The Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters. He had trouble securing a building for the organization until he was helped by a patron, Hilliard Griffin. After Griffin's death, his heirs raised the sale price of the building, forcing King to relocate.

Video Oral History Interview with Curtis King, Section A2004_222_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Curtis King originally called his organization The Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters but, upon realizing that the original Black Academy would not be revived, dropped "Junior" from the name. Aided by city officials, King secured a permanent space for The Black Academy of Arts and Letters (TBAAL) in a convention center in Dallas, Texas in 1989. The building boasts an 1800-seat theater, a 250-seat cabaret theater, a gift shop, lecture halls and a rehearsal hall. It is the largest space allotted to black arts in the United States. At the time of the interview, TBAAL had 4,000 paying members, a small staff, and a few hundred

volunteers. King remembers hosting breakfasts for his staff and volunteers; he also talks about programming, TBAAL's support for black artists and plans to sustain the organization financially on a long-term basis. King offers his definition of black art and talks about his parents' response to his career. He reflects upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.