

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend France A. Davis

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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>	Davis, France
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend France A. Davis,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 13, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:25:14).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Religious leader Reverend France A. Davis (1946 - ) was the pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Salt Lake City, Utah. He participated in the Civil Rights Movement and was instrumental in declaring Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official holiday in Utah. Davis also taught at the University of Utah and published two books. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 13, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_049
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend France Albert Davis was born on December 5, 1946 on a farm, outside of Gough, Georgia to John and Julia Davis. He attended and graduated from the segregated Waynesboro High & Industrial School in Waynesboro, Georgia in 1964. In 1966, Davis joined the United States Air Force where he served as an aircraft mechanic. He went on to earn his B.A. degree in rhetoric from the University of California at Berkeley and his B.S. degree in religion from Westminster College in Salt Lake City. Davis also earned his M.A. degree in mass communications from the University of Utah. He has attended several other universities including the Tuskegee Institute and Laney College in Oakland, studying subjects ranging from Afro-American Studies to arts and humanities.

In 1968, Davis served as the assistant to the pastor at St. Paul Baptist Church in Boise, Idaho. Then, in 1971, he received his certificate of ordination at Center Street Baptist Church in Oakland, California where he later became an associate and youth minister. In 1972, Davis came to Salt Lake City, Utah to fulfill a one-year teaching fellowship at the University of Utah. That same year, he joined Calvary Baptist Church where he later served as pastor and chief administrator.

During the 1960s, Davis participated in the Civil Rights Movement and marched from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama promoting voting rights for African Americans. At the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, he met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and received his spiritual calling into the ministry as a young man. In 1972, Davis was confronted by his minority status, when he was removed from the LDS Church-owned Brigham Young University campus for wearing an afro. As a political activist, Davis was also instrumental in declaring Martin Luther King Jr. Day as an official holiday, an achievement for which his church office was riddled with gun shots. He later furthered his education by earning his M.M. degree in ministry from Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho in 1994.

Davis has served as the secretary of the Salt Lake Ministerial Association; a member of the South Africa Preaching Team for the National Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission and as an advisor, vice-president and assistant to the Dean of the Intermountain General Baptist Convention. He has also taught as an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Communications at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. Davis has written several publications including *Light in the Midst of Zion: A History of Black Baptists in Utah 1892-1996* and his autobiography, *France Davis: An American Story Told* in 2007.

Davis lives in Salt Lake City, Utah with his wife, Willene. They have three children: Carolyn, Grace and France; and one grandson, Cedric.

Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 13, 2008.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend France A. Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 13, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Religious leader Reverend France A. Davis (1946 - ) was the pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Salt Lake City, Utah. He participated in the Civil Rights Movement and was instrumental in declaring Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official holiday in Utah. Davis also taught at the University of Utah and published two books.

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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:

Davis, France

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, France--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:

Religious Leader

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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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 Reverend France A. Davis, March 13, 2008. 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 Reverend France A. Davis, Section A2008\_049\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:38 ?

Reverend France A. Davis was born on December 5, 1946 in Burke County, Georgia to Julia Cooper Davis and John Davis. His paternal grandparents, Lula Davis and Robert Cooper, were freed slaves who became farmers in South Carolina. Davis' father moved to Burke County as a small boy, and left school in the third grade to work on his family's farm. Davis' maternal grandparents, Scoatney Scott Cooper and July Cooper, were also born into slavery, and became sharecroppers before purchasing their own land in Burke County, where Davis' mother was born and raised. She obtained an eighth grade education, and worked as a school teacher. Davis' parents met and married in rural Burke County, where they raised their family in the Cooperstown community. Each Sunday, the family attended services at the Roberson Grove Baptist Church in nearby Waynesboro, Georgia, where Davis' father was the Sunday school superintendent. Davis recalls his father's storytelling, and his family's experiences with the Ku Klux Klan.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend France A. Davis, Section A2008\_049\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Reverend France A. Davis grew up on a farm in Burke County, Georgia, where his family raised pigs, cows and chickens. As a child, Davis listened to Negro League Baseball games and Joe Louis' fights on the radio, and attended Gough Elementary School in Gough, Georgia, where his favorite teacher was Pearl Carter Oliphant. At Waynesboro High and Industrial School in Waynesboro, Georgia, Davis was a member of the New Farmers of America and the National Honor Society. In 1963, he attended the March on Washington while visiting his sister in Washington, D.C. He graduated in 1964, and went on to study agricultural engineering at the Tuskegee Institute. There, he was inspired by the civil rights activism of Harry Belafonte, Malcolm X and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. He joined the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and participated in the second Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. Although he followed the nonviolent methods of Dr. King, he supported the black power movement as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend France A. Davis, Section A2008\_049\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Reverend France A. Davis took part in the second march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Following his expulsion from the Tuskegee Institute due to poor grades, Davis joined the U.S. Air Force, and moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida in 1966. There, he received his call to ministry, and was mentored by Reverend George Houston. He completed basic and aircraft mechanic training in Texas, and was sent to Nevada's Nellis Air Force Base, where he became a crew chief. He was stationed in Thailand in 1967; and, upon returning to the United States in 1968, was assigned to the Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho until his discharge in 1970. Then, Davis moved to Oakland, California, where he studied at Laney College, Merritt College, the University of California, Berkeley, the Bay Cities Bible Institute and the Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1972, he moved to Salt Lake City to teach at the University of Utah; and, later that year, he became an associate pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend France A. Davis, Section A2008\_049\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Reverend France A. Davis earned a bachelor's degree in religion from Salt Lake City's Westminster College, and a master's degree in communications from the University of Utah in 1978. He also earned a master's degree in ministry from Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho. Davis was instrumental in the institution of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in the State of Utah. After the state legislature refused to implement the federal holiday in 1986, Davis engaged in a televised debate with Utah's U.S. Representative Robert B. Sykes, who opposed the law as well. He received death threats from some citizens, but successfully secured the holiday. Davis served as a leader of the Salt Lake Ministerial Association and the Intermountain General Baptist Association. He also acted as assistant to the dean of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., and travelled to South Africa with their preaching team. He published the book 'Light in the Midst of Zion: A History of Black Baptists in Utah, 1892 to 1996' in 1997.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend France A. Davis, Section A2008\_049\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Reverend France A. Davis wrote his autobiography, 'France Davis: An American Story Told,' with the help of author Nayra Atiya. As the pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Salt Lake City, Utah, Davis created various programs for children and elderly congregants, in addition to an AIDS/HIV education initiative and a finance program to provide scholarships to students. He talk about his religious philosophy and mentors, including Dr. Howard Thurman, James H. Cone, Reverend Henry Mitchell and Dr. L.K. Curry. He also describes his family, including his wife, Willene Witt Davis, and their three children: Carolyn Davis, Grace Davis and France Davis. He also reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. Davis concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.