

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reuben Cannon

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cannon, Reuben, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon,
Dates:	April 25, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:15:37).
Abstract:	Film casting director, television producer, and film producer Reuben Cannon (1946 -) produced the films Down in the Delta and Get on the Bus. Cannon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2001, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Producer and casting director Reuben Cannon was born on February 11, 1946 in Chicago, Illinois. He grew up in the Harold I. Ickes housing projects and attended Southeast City College.

Wanting to move into the entertainment industry, Cannon decided to try his luck in California. Dogged in his pursuit, Cannon went to film studios daily looking for work. After months of doing this, his perseverance paid off and Cannon was offered a job in the mailroom of Universal Studios on New Years Eve. Unbeknownst to him, the mailroom was the studio's executive training program, and thus a successful entertainment career began.

Cannon worked at Universal Studios from 1970 to 1978, eventually becoming a casting director. From 1977-1978, he served as Head of Television Casting for Warner Brothers. In 1978, he began his own casting agency, Reuben Cannon & Associates. As a casting director Cannon has been credited with launching the careers of many stars, including Oprah Winfrey, Danny Glover, Bruce Willis, Michael J. Fox, and Whoopi Goldberg. His casting credits include: "Promised Land", "Touched by an Angel", "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", "Desperado", "What's Love got To Do With It?", "The Color Purple", "Village of the Damned", "The Josephine Baker Story", "Moonlighting", and many others.

Cannon then moved into the realm of producing film and television in the 1980s. As a producer Cannon has made it a point to make movies about African Americans that are also financed by African Americans. His television producing credits include: "The Women of Brewster Place", "Amen", and many others. He has also produced his own films, including "Down on the Delta", "Get on the Bus", and "Dancing in September". Cannon has also worked as a producer on most of Tyler Perry's television shows and movies.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reuben Cannon was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 25, 2001, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Film casting director, television producer, and film producer Reuben Cannon (1946 -) produced the films Down in the Delta and Get on the Bus.

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:

- Cannon, Reuben, 1946-
- Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)
- Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
 - Cannon, Reuben, 1946---Interviews
-

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

Organizations:

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
-

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Reuben Cannon Productions

Reuben Cannon Productions

Occupations:

Film Casting Director

Television Producer

Film Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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 Reuben Cannon, April 25, 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 Reuben Cannon, Section A2001_010_001_001, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Reuben Cannon, Jr. attended the same South Side elementary school as his mother. His father was absent for the first five years of his life, having been sent to prison for armed robbery. His father returned when Reuben, Jr. was five years old and died of a heart attack three years later. Reuben, Jr. then became "the man of the house," working small jobs and allotting allowances to his three brothers and sisters. The family lived in the Harold Ickes housing project for much of his childhood and adolescence. Because there was no school nearby, black kids from the Ickes Homes were bussed to an elementary school in Chinatown. Cannon learned important cultural lessons at Haines Elementary School. One particularly inspirational teacher instilled in Cannon the idea that black people have contributed more to history than comedy. Cannon also befriended a Chinese boy there; their friendship ended when Cannon was forced to align himself with the black kids from his neighborhood. After his father's death, Cannon's maternal grandmother moved into the family's apartment. This was the beginning of a bitter war between the young Cannon and 'Mama,' in which Cannon researched current events in order to challenge all of his grandmother's assertions.

African American children--Illinois--Chicago.

African American fathers--Illinois--Chicago.

African American grandparents--Illinois--Chicago.

Death.

Public housing--Illinois--Chicago.

Mentoring in education--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon, Section A2001_010_001_002, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Reuben Cannon discusses his childhood and adolescence in the Harold Ickes housing project on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. Cannon describes a tumultuous relationship with his grandmother, who he tried to have arrested for her authoritarian parenting. He credits his mother and grandmother with steering him away from the criminal activities that his friends had begun to pursue. Cannon preferred the spotlight that his singing talents had afforded him. Cannon found two male mentors, a teacher and a homeless man, who encouraged his pursuit of greatness. Cannon then met a young woman on his paper route who he began to date. She became pregnant with his child and the two eventually married. He worked sixteen-hour days at a steel mill to support his new family. Cannon attributes their separation and subsequent divorce to their youth and naivete. He began a new job reading gas meters.

Public housing--Illinois--Chicago.

African American communities--Illinois--Chicago--South Side.

African American grandmothers--Illinois--Chicago.

African American s--Mentoring.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago.

Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon, Section A2001_010_001_003, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Upon graduating from high school, Reuben Cannon enrolled in college and worked as a gas meter reader in Chicago, Illinois. A friend from a former job encouraged him to move out to California and pursue his dreams of working in the entertainment industry. After inquiring daily for a month, Cannon was hired

to work in the mailroom of Universal Studios, its unofficial executive training grounds. He performed his mail boy duties well and eventually interviewed for a position as a casting trainee. His future boss's unorthodox hiring process afforded Cannon the job of which he had dreamed. In working for Universal Studios and Warner Bros., Cannon cast many significant projects, including 'Moonlighting,' 'Roots II: The Next Generation,' and 'The Color Purple.' His entrepreneurial spirit eventually led him to initiate Reuben Cannon & Associates, a successful independent casting and production agency. Cannon recognizes the significance of bringing other black people with him in his career ascent. He credits himself with giving subsequent black casting directors their career breaks.

African American college students--Illinois--Chicago.

Universal Pictures (Firm)

Warner Bros. Entertainment

Casting directors.

Reuben Cannon Productions.

Minorities--Vocational guidance--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon, Section A2001_010_001_004, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Reuben Cannon, an established casting director, describes his decision to initiate an independent casting and production agency, Reuben Cannon & Associates. Cannon discusses his experience as casting director for the film 'The Color Purple.' Work duties brought him to Chicago where he met and cast local talk show host Oprah Winfrey for the role of Sophie in the film. Cannon discusses the role of his wife, Linda, in the legal aspects of Reuben Cannon & Associates. His second project with Oprah Winfrey, 'The Women of Brewster Place' mini-series, saw Cannon in a new role as producer. In an effort to generate more uncomprised black films, Cannon raised money for, and produced 'Down in the Delta' and 'Get on the Bus.' He recognizes the wealth of black talent in Hollywood and suggests that black people must contribute, financially, if they would like to see a certain caliber of black film. Cannon has repeated his model of raising funds and creating independent black films with much success.

Winfrey, Oprah.

Reuben Cannon Productions.

Color purple (Motion picture)

Minorities in motion pictures.

Independent films--Fund raising.

Married women--Employment.

Down in the delta (Motion picture)

Get on the bus (Motion picture)

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon, Section A2001_010_001_005, TRT: 0:14:33 ?

Reuben Cannon, a successful casting agent and producer, describes that his legacy can be found in the numbers of black casting directors and others in the entertainment industry that he has brought with him on his career ascent. He dreams of community arts organizations in black neighborhoods that would nurture artisitic talent and then "recycle" it, or use the talent for good in these very neighborhoods. Cannon believes that excellence is an effective weapon against racism and he encourages his children to work hard at whatever they do. He asserts that black people are unique in their capacity for forgiveness. Cannon finds inspiration in Bill Russell and other accomplished athletes. He speculates that his father and grandmother, both deceased, would take great pride in his

successes.

African American neighborhoods--Arts centers.

African American communities.

African American mothers.

Racism.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben Cannon, Section
A2001_010_REUBEN_CANNON_06_MED_002, TRT: 0:06:40 ?

This tape contains clips from Reuben Cannon's interview with The
HistoryMakers.