

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gossett, Louis, 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr.,
Dates:	April 25, 2005 and March 30, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:46:32).
Abstract:	Actor Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. (1936 -) is most well-known for winning an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in "An Officer and a Gentleman." Gossett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2005 and March 30, 2005, in Malibu, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_086
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. was born May 27, 1936 in Sheepshead Bay, Coney Island to Hellen Rebecca Wray Gossett and Louis Gossett Sr.. Gossett's Brooklyn neighborhood nurtured activists and artists like Gustav Blum, Harvey Keitel, Neil Simon, Neil Diamond and Arthur Miller. Gossett attended PS 135 and was student body president of Mark Twain Junior High School (PS 209). When Gossett acted in a production of *You Can't Take It With You* at Abraham Lincoln High School, talent scouts picked him for Broadway's *Take A Giant Step*, for which Gossett won the Donaldson Award in 1952 for best newcomer to theatre. In 1954, he appeared in *Desk Set* with Shirley Booth. After graduation Gossett received a basketball scholarship to New York University. The 6'4" Gossett, who also pitched against Sandy Koufax, was drafted by the New York Knickerbockers in 1958.

Deciding to forego sports for acting, Gossett studied at The Actors Studio with John Sticks and Peggy Fury. In 1961, Gossett's acting skills were soon noticed when he was cast in the Broadway production and movie *Raisin in the Sun*. He was also in the all-star cast of 1961's *The Blacks* that featured James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson, Roscoe Lee Brown and Maya Angelou. Gossett later went on to appear in small television roles including: *The Bush Baby* and *Companions in Nightmare*. Gossett briefly tried his hand at folk singing before he got his first big movie role in *The Landlord* with Diana Sands. Gossett has appeared in over 50 movies and hundreds of television shows between 1971 and 1999. Some of the more popular shows he appeared in (listed in chronological order) are: *Skin Game* , *The Deep* , *Don't Look Back: The Story of Leroy "Satchel" Paige* , *Sadat* , *Finders Keepers*, *Enemy Mine*, *Firewalker* , *Iron Eagle*, *A Gathering of Old Men* , *The Principal*, *The Father Clements Story* , *Diggstown* , *Return to Lonesome Dove* , *Curse of the Starving Class* , *A Good Man in Africa* , *Ray Alexander* , *Captive Heart: The James Mink Story* , *Y2K* , and *Lackawanna Blues* . Gossett was awarded an Emmy for his portrayal of "Fiddler" in Alex Haley's miniseries *Roots* (1977). He won a Golden Globe Award for HBO's *The Josephine Baker Story* (1991) and an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982).

Gossett's community involvement began in 1964, when he received a grant with James Earl Jones and Paul Sorvino to begin a theatre group for trouble bound youth. Gossett, who often plays strong role models, frequently speaks to youth groups about manhood, drugs and life. Gossett also partnered with Father George Clements to develop Shamba Centers to teach African American history and culture. Eracism is a non-profit that Gossett developed in an effort to combat racism in America and abroad. In 2005, he sponsored a Los Angeles anti-violence effort called One Summer of Peace.

Louis Gossett, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 30, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 25, 2005 and March 30, 2005, in Malibu, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actor Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. (1936 -) is most well-known for winning an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Sergeant Emil Foley in "An Officer and a Gentleman."

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:

Gossett, Louis, 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Gossett, Louis, 1936---Interviews

African American actors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

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 Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., April 25, 2005 and March 30, 2005. 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 Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_001_001, TRT: 0:29:47 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. was born on May 27, 1936 in Brooklyn, New York. His mother, Helen Rebecca Wray, was born in Watkinsville, Georgia in the 1920s. Wray was a mixed-race woman of Native American descent, and grew up around Athens-Clarke County, Georgia. Gossett describes his maternal family history. His father, Louis Gamal Gossett was born in Bennettsville, South Carolina in the 1910s. The Gossett family migrated to New York City, New York in the 1920s, and Gossett, Jr. was in the first generation born and raised in the North. He describes growing up in Brooklyn, New York, and spending summers in Georgia on his great-grandmother's watermelon farm. He contrasts living in a multiracial northern city to living in the racially homogenous South. Gossett remembers his great-grandparents, farming as a boy, and experiencing racism in the South. He shares his belief in the importance of preserving ancestry and archiving, and his plans to facilitate learning and exploration of black history and culture.

Bennettsville (S.C.)--Social life and customs--20th century.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Coney Island (New York, N.Y.).

Simon, Neil.

Miller, Arthur, 1915-.

Segregation in transportation--Southern States.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_001_002, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. describes his father's family background and the events leading to his Broadway debut. Gossett's father, Louis Gamal Gossett, was born in Bennettsville, South Carolina, in the Gullah region of North America. Gossett explains the history of Bennettsville, and describes the culture of its native people, the Geechee. Gossett talks about his relationship with his father and his earliest childhood memories in the South. Gossett attended Mark Twain Junior High and Abraham Lincoln High School, and describes the advantages of growing up in an urban multicultural and multiracial neighborhood. In 1953, Gossett was cast in a lead role in the play titled 'Take A Giant Step' by African American playwright Louis S. Peterson. The work debuted at the Forrest Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1953. Gossett trained with several notable theater personalities and delivered an outstanding performance. Following his debut, he was cast in several early television roles in the 1950s.

Gullahs--History--South Carolina--Charleston County.

Mafia--United States--New York (State)--New York.

Broadway (New York, N.Y.).

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Brooklyn (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_001_003, TRT: 0:28:12 ?

Louis Gossett, Jr. describes his experience as a child actor as well as his decision

to commit to acting. Gossett earned a Donaldson Award for best newcomer in 1953 for his performance in 'Take A Giant Step.' Gossett talks about the cultural and political climate of the 1950s, including the impact of communist repression and the influence of gospel music. 'Take a Giant Step' ran successfully for two years; however, Gossett still hoped to be a professional athlete. He enrolled in New York University, and describes having to balance his social life, acting, and collegiate sports. Gossett walked away from sports entirely in 1959, after suffering an injury at a tryout with the New York Knicks. Afterwards, he was cast in the Broadway debut of Lorraine Hansberry's 'A Raisin in the Sun.' He reflects on his family's reaction to the performance. Gossett also describes working alongside HistoryMakers Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, and explains their influence on his decision to commit to a career in the theater.

Five Blind Boys of Alabama.

Dixie Hummingbirds (Vocal group).

Wilson, Jackie.

Mighty Clouds of Joy (Musical group).

Gospel music.

Television broadcasting--Auditions.

Hansberry, Lorraine, 1930-1965. Raisin in the sun.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_001_004, TRT: 0:28:38 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. was cast in the 1954 stage play 'The Desk Set' in Wilmington, Delaware. He was refused service at a New England restaurant until the play's lead, Shirley Booth, threatened to quit if Gossett was not served. In 1961, Gossett starred in Jean Genet's off-Broadway play 'The Blacks,' which featured James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson and HistoryMaker Maya Angelou among other notables. He talks about his other early performance credits including the television movie 'Companions in Nightmare.' In 1966, Gossett flew to Universal Studios in Los Angeles, California for filming, and was among the first group of African Americans to stay in the Beverly Hills Hotel. He describes being racially profiled onsite and handcuffed to a tree by local police. In 1969, Gossett starred in his first motion picture 'Bushbaby,' which began filming in Kenya in 1964. Gossett describes the lasting impression of his first trip to Africa.

Racism--Deleware--Wilimington.

Racism--California--Beverly Hills.

Hollywood (Los Angeles, Calif.).

Beverly Hills Hotel.

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_001_005, TRT: 0:29:04 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. reflects on major milestones in his career in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1970, Gossett made his first major film appearance in 'The Landlord' followed by 'Skin Game' in 1971. In 1971, he also won a Drama Critics' Circle Award for his portrayal of Patrice Lumumba in the play 'Murderous Angels.' Gossett highlights his favorite performances, and talks about the influence of television and the importance of multicultural representation in the media. Gossett speaks about starring in the groundbreaking miniseries 'Roots' in 1977 as well as pivotal moments in his performance in the show, including improvising the closing lines of the iconic whipping scene. Gossett describes the value in, and demand for, African American historical

narratives. Gossett won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in 1982 for his role in 'An Officer and a Gentleman,' becoming only the second black male to receive an Oscar after Sidney Poitier. He describes preparing for the role and winning that night.

African American actors.

Officer and a gentleman (Motion picture).

Roots (Television program: 1977).

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_002_006, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. speaks about his life and movie roles in the 1980s. Gossett did not receive substantial film work after his Oscar win in 1982. He was offered a moderate number of television roles, and describes feeling unappreciated. In 1983, Gossett portrayed former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat in the two-part television miniseries, 'Sadat.' The casting decision was criticized because Gossett was African American and not Arab. He describes other television and film work in the 1980s including 'Enemy Mine' in 1985, 'Iron Eagle' in 1986, and 'The Father Clements Story' in 1987. In 1988, Gossett was featured in a 'Roots' reprisal called 'Roots: The Next Generations.' He speaks about his choice to portray mentor-figures, and the real-world need for mentorship. Gossett argues that storytelling is the obligation of the community, and not the responsibility of Hollywood. He lists the films he has produced, and what stories and biopics he would like to see in the future.

Drug addiction--United States.

Academy Awards (Motion pictures).

Method acting--History.

Officer and a gentleman (Motion picture).

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_002_007, TRT: 0:27:30 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. talks about his interest in historical films, and at the time, his current and upcoming projects. In 1996, Gossett starred in the television movie 'Captive Heart' about the black Canadian businessman James Mink. Mink's mixed race daughter was kidnapped and sold into slavery in the American South. The movie depicts the expedition to rescue her. In 2005, Gossett was featured in the television movie adaptation of Ruben Santiago-Hudson's play 'Lackawanna Blues.' Gossett talks about the state of black representation in Hollywood, and imagines hypothetical projects for his future including a biopic about the life and career of black comedian Stepin Fetchit. Gossett describes his favorite and most difficult roles, and the lengthy makeup application process he underwent in 'Enemy Mine.' He talks about his hopes and concerns for the African American community and of his two sons. Gossett considers what he would have done differently, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Fetchit, Stepin.

African American motion picture producers and directors.

Lackawanna blues (Motion picture).

Stargate SG-1 (Television program).

Video Oral History Interview with Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr., Section A2005_086_002_008, TRT: 0:24:26 ?

Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. describes how he prepares for a role and narrates his photographs.

Method Acting--Drama.
Mentoring in the arts--United States.
Role models--United States.