

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ophelia DeVore

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	DeVore-Mitchell, Ophelia, 1922-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ophelia DeVore,
Dates:	March 14, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:51).
Abstract:	Fashion and talent entrepreneur Ophelia DeVore (1922 - 2014) became one of the first African American models in America in 1938. She is a co-founder of the Grace Del Marco Modeling Agency, and founder of the Ophelia DeVore School of Self-Development and Modeling. Devore was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 14, 2006, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_035
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pioneering entrepreneur Ophelia DeVore was born on August 12, 1922 in Edgefield, South Carolina. Her father, John Walter DeVore, was of German and French descent and her mother, Mary Emma Strother, was a combination of Native American and African American. During the 1920s, DeVore attended segregated schools until age nine, when she moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina to live with her uncle, John Strother, who was co-owner of the African American transportation system, Safeway Bus Company. In 1933, her parents sent her to New York City to live with her great-aunt, Stella Carter, in order to complete her studies. DeVore received her diploma from Hunter College High School and attended New York University where she studied mathematics and languages.

Having attended the Vogue School of Modeling in New York, DeVore became one of the first African American models in the America in 1938 at the age of sixteen. Keenly aware of how African Americans were stereotypically depicted in the printed media, she made it her mission to change these images. In 1946, with the help of four friends, she founded the Grace Del Marco Modeling Agency and in 1948, she opened the Ophelia DeVore School of Self-Development and Modeling. Since then, thousands of people have been nurtured by her agency including Diahann Carroll, Barbara McNair, Cicely Tyson, Richard Roundtree and Raymond St. Jacques. DeVore made a name for herself in Europe as well as in America. She is credited for entering Cecelia Cooper, an African American dancer, into the Miss Festival beauty contest at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival, which she won. In 1960, LeJeune Hundley also from DeVore's agency was crowned Miss Festival at the Cannes Film Festival.

In addition to her modeling agency, she owns *The Columbus Times*, a Georgia-based newspaper begun by her second husband, the late Vernon Mitchell. She has maintained the thirty-two year old paper's strong journalistic excellence and emphasis on African American life and history. Due to her business acumen, she has served as consultant to many of America's Fortune 500 corporations. DeVore has received more than 200 awards and honors from corporate, political, educational, governmental and social agencies.

DeVore lives in New York with her family.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ophelia DeVore was conducted by Shawn Wilson on March 14, 2006, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fashion and talent entrepreneur Ophelia DeVore (1922 - 2014) became one of the first African American models in America in 1938. She is a co-founder of the Grace Del Marco Modeling Agency, and founder of the Ophelia DeVore School of Self-Development and Modeling.

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:

DeVore-Mitchell, Ophelia, 1922-2014

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

DeVore-Mitchell, Ophelia, 1922-2014 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Fashion and Talent Entrepreneur

HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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 Ophelia DeVore, March 14, 2006. 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 Ophelia DeVore, Section A2006_035_001_001, TRT: 0:30:24 ?

Ophelia DeVore was born on August 12, 1922 in Edgefield, South Carolina to John DeVore and Mary Strother-DeVore. Her mother, a schoolteacher and church organist, was of Native American, African American, and European American descent. DeVore's father was of German and French descent and

worked as a railroad contractor. DeVore talks about her parents' interracial marriage and her identity as an American. She describes her memories of growing up in the countryside, of Christmas celebrations, and of meditating as a child. From an early age, DeVore wanted to change people's perception of color. As a girl, she mimicked her mother's poise and attended boarding school due to her father's itinerant job. DeVore lived with her uncle John Strother, co-owner of Safeway Bus Company, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina before moving to Manhattan's Sugar Hill neighborhood in New York City where she attended the white Stitt Junior High School. DeVore talks about the Cannes Film Festival and the modeling industry in the 1940s.

Video Oral History Interview with Ophelia DeVore, Section A2006_035_001_002, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Ophelia DeVore recounts her early years in the fashion industry. Her modeling work appeared in Ebony magazine and the Pittsburgh Courier. She also worked as a fashion columnist and a marketing consultant. In 1946, DeVore founded Grace Del Marco, a modeling agency, with four friends. The friends also started a charm school in 1948, to train models for fashion shows. Both ventures struggled, DeVore's associates left, and DeVore decided to enroll at the Vogue School of Modeling in New York to learn the modeling industry. Stress and overwork led DeVore to have a heart attack in her twenties. DeVore's first husband, Harold Carter, was the first black fireman in New York. Their children were integrated into DeVore's business. She describes the modeling industry's eagerness to integrate for profit which opened the door for models of color. In 1954, DeVore started ABC's "Spotlight in Harlem" with Ralph Cooper. She talks about HistoryMaker Diahann Carroll's breakthrough in "Jazz Train" and "Chance of a Lifetime."

Video Oral History Interview with Ophelia DeVore, Section A2006_035_001_003, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Ophelia DeVore's students share testimonials about the Ophelia DeVore School. Olivette Taylor credits DeVore with her refinement. Taylor's daughter, Devette Taylor, entered the Ophelia DeVore School in 2001 and was awarded Miss Teen Showcase. Her experience taught her strength, innovation, and goal-setting. DeVore helped Patricia Myers, a student in 2004, pursue her love of writing. Eleanor Williams' participation in the Ophelia DeVore School increased her self-esteem by teaching her poise and giving her motivation. Barbara Adamoli, an Italian singer and actress became a teacher at DeVore's school after taking a course in 1994. Catherine Peppers also became a teacher at the Ophelia DeVore School after completing their program. The co-president of the school's alumni association, Pamela Pryor describes the transformative impact of the school on her daughter and on herself. Camille Petty, a nurse, talks about her partnership with DeVore to transform the public image of nurses through the Ophelia DeVore School.

Video Oral History Interview with Ophelia DeVore, Section A2006_035_001_004, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Ophelia DeVore's former student, Dell Pinckney, attended the Ophelia DeVore School in its nascence in 1946. Ophelia DeVore describes how she helped Cecelia Cooper become the first person of color to win the title of Miss Cannes Festival in 1959. LeJeune Hundley, another one of DeVore's models claimed the title in 1960. As a marketing consultant at Schering-Plough and Johnson & Johnson, DeVore increased the presence of black models on TV in a way that appealed to broad audiences. Helen Williams, a Grace Del Marco model, became one of the faces of Johnson & Johnson's historic "Modess...because" ad campaign. Another one of DeVore's models, HistoryMaker Diahann Carroll, found success as an actress in "Julia." In 1968, DeVore married Vernon Mitchell, publisher of the Columbus Times. DeVore worked as an investigative

journalist in Nigeria during the Biafran War. DeVore also talks about her 1971 lawsuit against Life magazine, racism in the modeling industry, and Vogue's first African American model, Beverly Johnson.

Video Oral History Interview with Ophelia DeVore, Section A2006_035_001_005, TRT: 0:28:22 ?

Ophelia DeVore guided the early modeling careers of Cicely Tyson, Bea Richards, Gil Noble, Richard Roundtree, and HistoryMaker Susan Taylor. She also helped Melba Tolliver land a job as a make-up artist at ABC, leading to Tolliver's hire as the network's first black newscaster. DeVore talks about Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt, and Emily Post, as well as her experience at the Vogue School of Modeling in New York City. DeVore's health issues inspired an initiative at the Ophelia DeVore School to train nurses and change the public perception of nurses. She enjoys a close relationship with her children. Her daughter, Carol Carter Gertjegerdes, runs the Columbus Times, a minority newspaper which was owned by DeVore's second husband, Vernon Mitchell. DeVore describes the importance of history, her hopes and concerns for the African American community, her legacy, and how she would like to be remembered. DeVore and Camille Petty talk about the alumni association and the nursing initiative at the Ophelia DeVore School.