

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ken Page

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Page, Ken
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ken Page,
Dates:	April 4, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:19:31).
Abstract:	Actor Ken Page (1954 -) portrayed the Lion in <i>The Wiz</i> , Old Deuteronomy in the American Broadway debut of <i>Cats</i> , and was featured as an original cast member in the Fats Waller musical revue <i>Ain't Misbehavin'</i> , for which he was awarded the Drama Desk Award. Page was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 4, 2008, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_074
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor Ken Page was born on January 20, 1954 in St. Louis, Missouri. He was raised by his mother and step-father, Gloria and Garvin Gilstrap. As a youth, he attended St. Louis' St. Bridget of Erin and St. Nicholas Elementary Schools. While attending St. Nicholas, Page was inspired by the founder of the school's speech club, Sister Ruth Cecilia, and his older cousin to pursue a career in theater. In 1973, he graduated from Bishop Dubourg High School where he received special training in theatrical arts.

In 1973, Ken Page received a full scholarship to attend Fontbonne College located in Clayton, Missouri where he majored in theater. While attending Fontbonne College, he was cast in his first paid role as "Stewpot" in a theatrical production of *South Pacific*, a musical that featured Frank Sutton, Mary Travers, and Theresa Merrit. A year later, Page moved to New York, where he began working with the Fanfare Children's Ensemble. While performing with the Fanfare Children's Ensemble, he made appearances as Jim in a production of *Huck Finn*. He also worked with the Amas Repertory Theatre and the Henry Street Settlement, starring in the musicals *Ragtime Blues* and *Louis*.

Ken Page made his Broadway debut in 1976 starring in an all black revival of *Guys and Dolls*. Then in 1977, he played the role of the Lion in the hit musical *The Wiz*. In 1978, Page would later go on to be featured as an original cast member in the Fats Waller musical revue *Ain't Misbehavin'* and was subsequently awarded the Drama Desk Award for his performance. He would later duplicate this performance in an NBC television special and in Paris, France. In 1982, Page originated the role of Old Deuteronomy in the Broadway production of *Cats* and repeated his performance in a PBS version of the play. During the 1980s, Page made appearances in several films and television sitcoms including *Gimme A Break* (1984); *Sable* (1987); *Torch Song Trilogy* (1988) and *Polly* (1989). He continued his work in the entertainment industry during the 1990s and was hired to appear in such television shows as *Family Matters* (1990); *South Central* (1994) and *Touched By An Angel* (1995). In 2000, Page starred in

the Broadway show *Ain't Nothin' But The Blues*, and in 2006, he was hired as cast member in the musical film *DreamGirls*.

Ken Page was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 4, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ken Page was conducted by Jacques Lesure on April 4, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actor Ken Page (1954 -) portrayed the Lion in *The Wiz*, Old Deuteronomy in the American Broadway debut of *Cats*, and was featured as an original cast member in the Fats Waller musical revue *Ain't Misbehavin'*, for which he was awarded the Drama Desk Award.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Page, Ken

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Page, Ken--Interviews

African American actors--Interviews

African American singers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

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 Ken Page, April 4, 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).

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 Ken Page, Section A2008_074_001_001, TRT: 0:30:04 ?

Ken Page was born on January 20, 1954 in St. Louis, Missouri to Gloria Page Gilstrap and Robert Jones. His maternal grandmother, Q.T. Page, was raised by her aunt May Ross in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. There, she married his maternal grandfather, George H. Page, and had five children. His mother moved to St. Louis, where she met and married his father, who was originally from Mississippi. After their separation, his mother later remarried to Garvin Gilstrap. Page grew up in the all-black Kerry Patch neighborhood of St. Louis. He began his education at the public Franklin School, where his first performance was voicing a hand puppet, and singing 'Easter Parade' for a school program. He transitioned to the Catholic St. Bridget's of Erin School, where he performed 'Why Do We Tip Our Hats to a Priest?' His family later moved to the Carr Square Village housing project, and he transferred to the all-black St. Nicholas Grade School. There, he was recruited by Sister Ruth Cecelia to join the Bellarmine Speech League.

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Catholic schools--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Theater--Study and teaching--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Page, Section A2008_074_001_002, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Ken Page was raised in the Catholic faith, and attended St. Nicholas Grade School, where he joined the primarily white Bellarmine Speech League. He was mentored by Sister Ruth Cecelia, who later advocated for Page's admittance into Bishop DuBourg High School. There, he sang as a heldentenor in the St. Pius X High School Concert Choir, and as the Ziegfeld Tenor in the school's production of 'Funny Girl' during his first year. In his sophomore year, he portrayed Horace Vandergelder in his school's production of 'Hello, Dolly!' alongside a white female student, whose parents initially did not want her to perform with him. He went on to appear as Fagin in 'Oliver!' and Tevye in 'Fiddler on the Roof.' During the summers, he participated in the Upward Bound program. With the encouragement of his theater teacher, Mary Lee Hummert, Page auditioned for a music and theater scholarship to Fontbonne College. He matriculated there in 1973, where he was inspired by his African American music professor, Relford Patterson.

Segregation--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Bishop DuBourg High School--Students.

Fontbonne University--Students.

African American high school students.

Catholic high schools--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Page, Section A2008_074_001_003, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Ken Page studied theater at the Fontbonne College in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was influenced by his drama professor Gordon Garner. Page's first role was Henry the VIII in the college's production of 'Royal Gambit: A Drama in Five Acts.' During that time, he was also active in The Municipal Opera Association of St. Louis, where he sang in the chorus, appeared in 'South Pacific' and received advice from actress Theresa Merritt. He left college after two years, and moved to New York City to pursue acting. There, he obtained temporary work at the New York City Department of Social Services, until he was cast as runaway slave Jim in the Fanfare Children's Ensemble's travelling production of 'Huckleberry Finn.' Page was later cast in the ensemble of 'Purlie' at the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami, Florida, where he acted alongside Robert

Guillaume. In 1975, the show went on a national tour, and later premiered at the Aquarius Theater in Los Angeles, California.

Fontbonne University--Students.

Municipal Theatre Association of St. Louis. Municipal Opera Orchestra.

Merritt, Theresa.

Manhattan (New York, N.Y.).

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

Children's theater--New York (State)--New York.

Davis, Ossie. Purlie victorious.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Page, Section A2008_074_001_004, TRT: 0:28:29 ?

Ken Page was cast as Nicely-Nicely Johnson in the first all-black Broadway production of 'Guys and Dolls,' which also starred his former co-star Robert Guillaume. Although the production drew criticism from the white theater community, Page was later awarded the Theatre World Award for his role. After 'Guys and Dolls,' Page performed a solo musical revue of black Broadway shows including 'The Wiz,' which landed him the role of the Lion in the play alongside Andre De Shields. In 1977, he portrayed Fats Waller in the off Broadway musical revue of Fats Waller's music, 'Ain't Misbehavin'.' which featured De Shields and Armelia McQueen. The show's musical catalogue was acquired by RCA Records, and later premiered in Los Angeles, California. The following year, the production was turned into a primetime television special by NBC, and toured in Paris, France. Page went on to portray King Oliver in 'Louis,' and was then cast as Old Deuteronomy in the 1982 American Broadway premiere of 'Cats.'

Broadway (New York, N.Y.).

Ain't misbehavin'.

Musical theater--New York (State)--New York.

African Americans in the performing arts.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Page, Section A2008_074_001_005, TRT: 0:21:44 ?

Ken Page appeared as Old Deuteronomy in the 1982 American Broadway premiere of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical 'Cats' when he was twenty-seven years old. The cast also included actors Betty Buckley and Terrence Mann. As Old Deuteronomy, Page successfully persuaded creator Andrew Lloyd Webber to change the tone register of his singing parts, in order to further distinguish his character's role. After one year with the production, Page moved to Los Angeles, California in 1984, where he pursued a career in the film and television industry. In 1998, Page was chosen by Andrew Lloyd Webber to portray Old Deuteronomy in the film production of 'Cats.' Page reflects upon the state of theater industry, and the availability of roles for African American actors. He also shares his advice for young African American entertainers. Page describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered.

Cats (Musical).

Weber, Andrew Lloyd.

Broadway (New York, N.Y.).

Television broadcasting--California--Los Angeles.