

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Causey

---

## 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>	Causey, James E.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Causey,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 17, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:50:54).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper reporter James Causey (1969 - ) was a reporter, editor, editorial writer and night city editor for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Causey also served as an editor in the paper's Metro department, as an editorial writer on urban affairs as the president and treasurer for the Wisconsin Black Media Association. Causey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 17, 2008, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_132
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Editor and reporter James Edward Causey was born on August 1, 1969 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Otha R. Causey and James D. Causey. Causey graduated from Marshall High School in Milwaukee in 1987. He received his B.A. degree in communications from Marquette University in Milwaukee in 1992 and his M.B.A. from Cardinal Stritch University in Fox Point, Wisconsin in 2002.

Causey became interested in journalism in middle school when he won an essay contest about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, the state's largest African-American newspaper. He started writing for that newspaper periodically and then, as a student at Marshall High School, landed an internship at the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. Causey then worked as a reporter for the *Milwaukee Sentinel* from 1987 through 1995. Since 1995, Causey has been a reporter, editor, and editorial writer for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, where he has also served as the night city editor. Causey became an editor in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* metro department in 1999. That same year, he began serving as the president and treasurer for the Wisconsin Black Media Association. In 2008, Causey was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He joined the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* editorial board in June 2008 as an editorial writer on urban affairs.

Causey resides in Milwaukee and has one child, Taylor Marie Causey.

Causey was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 17, 2008.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Causey was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 17, 2008, in

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper reporter James Causey (1969 - ) was a reporter, editor, editorial writer and night city editor for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Causey also served as an editor in the paper's Metro department, as an editorial writer on urban affairs as the president and treasurer for the Wisconsin Black Media Association.

---

## 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:

Causey, James E.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Causey, James E.--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Newspaper Reporter

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

---

## 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 James Causey, November 17, 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 James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:37 ?

James Causey was born on August 1, 1969 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Otha Tobias Causey and James D. Causey. His family had roots in Mississippi, where his maternal great-great-grandfather was murdered for standing up to a white man. Causey's maternal grandfather, Minister Marion Tobias, owned land in McComb, Mississippi, where he pastored three Baptist churches. He also raised ten children with Causey's maternal grandmother, Pearleana Tobias. Causey's paternal grandparents, David Causey and Ruth Anderson Pinkney, met in Gloster, Mississippi, and separated shortly after Causey's father was born. Causey's parents met in McComb, and courted until his father was drafted into the U.S. Army, and his mother moved away to study nursing. Years later, in

1987, Causey attended a meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists in New York City. There, he met his paternal uncle, journalist Isaac Causey, with whom he later travelled to the U.S. Virgin Islands to assist with hurricane relief efforts.

Video Oral History Interview with James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

James Causey's paternal grandfather's ancestors were born free in Mississippi during the era of slavery. His paternal great-grandmother, Minda Anderson, had Cherokee heritage. After his paternal grandfather, David Causey, left his paternal grandmother, Ruth Anderson Pinkney, she married handyman Orelous Pinkney, who purchased twenty-five acres of land in Gloster, Mississippi. There, he built a house, harvested timber and raised livestock. Causey's father served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War; and, upon his return, moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he studied welding at the Milwaukee Area Technical College. Causey's parents married in 1967, and lived together in Milwaukee, where his mother worked as an assembly line manager at the Koss Corporation, a salad maker at Karl Ratzsch's restaurant and a dietary assistant at the hospital. His father was employed as a welder at Safway Steel Products, Inc. Causey also describes the traditional medicine and superstitions of Mississippi's black community.

Video Oral History Interview with James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

James Causey began his education at the Robert M. LaFollette School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He later transferred to the Samuel Clemens School, and then attended the seventh grade at Jackie Robinson Middle School. There, Causey was beaten for refusing to join the 2-7 Boys gang, which motivated him to enroll in lessons at the Al Moreland Boxing Club. At school, Causey wrote a fictional story about Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. that was featured in the Milwaukee Community Journal, and was then hired by the newspaper's publisher, Patricia O'Flynn Thomas. He worked alongside her son, Arrested Development rapper Speech; and wrote a column aimed at teenagers. Causey studied at John Marshall High School, a specialized journalism school, where he excelled academically and was active in the athletics program. Causey also remembers the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan in 1981, Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's presidential campaign in 1984 and the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986.

Video Oral History Interview with James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:24 ?

James Causey was inspired to become a journalist by editorial writer Gregory Stanford, who spoke to Causey's class at Jackie Robinson Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Causey went on to attend John Marshall High School; and, during his junior year, was selected for an internship at the Milwaukee Sentinel. He attended the Urban Journalism Workshop summer program at Marquette University, where he matriculated following his high school graduation in 1987. While a student, Causey worked part time as a police beat reporter for the Milwaukee Sentinel, for which he also interviewed James Cameron, the founder of the America's Black Holocaust Museum. In 1988, Causey helped expose the discriminatory practices of the Milwaukee Police Department while covering the story of white serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who murdered thirteen African American men. Causey remembers Dahmer's killing in prison by fellow inmate Christopher J. Scarver, and the beating of Frank Jude, Jr. by off-duty Milwaukee police officers in 2004.

Video Oral History Interview with James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

James Causey graduated from Marquette University in 1992, and joined the Milwaukee Sentinel as a full time police beat reporter. Following the

newspaper's rebranding as the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Causey became the first black journalist to work in the publication's business department, and was later promoted to cover Milwaukee's banking industry. He earned an M.B.A. degree from Cardinal Stritch University, and wrote a thesis on minority representation in the news industry. He became the newspaper's urban affairs editor; and later, while serving as the night city editor, challenged the newspaper's discriminatory descriptions of criminal suspects. In 2007, Causey received a Harvard Nieman Fellowship for his research proposal on the hip hop industry's influence on America's central cities. In 2008, he returned to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel as an editorial writer. Causey also remembers the murder of Barbara Lynch Anderson in 1992, and the fatal mob beating of Charles Young, Jr. in 2002.

Video Oral History Interview with James Causey, Section A2008\_132\_001\_006, TRT: 0:24:12 ?

James Causey received an award from the National Association of Black Journalists for his story on professional boxer Gerald McClellan. Causey later served as the president of the Wisconsin Black Media Association. He talks about his editorial influences, including journalists Leonard Pitts and Mikel Holt; and describes his plans for his career. He also shares his advice to young black journalists, as well as his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Causey reflects upon his life, legacy, family and values; and then concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.