

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Allison J. Davis

Overview of the Collection

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Davis, Allison Jeanne, 1953- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, |
| Dates: | January 13, 2014 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2014 |
| Physical Description: | 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:10:30). |
| Abstract: | Television executive and non-profit executive Allison J. Davis (1953 -) was an executive producer for NBC News and MSNBC, and senior executive of CBS, Dunbar Productions and the Jackie Robinson Foundation. She was one of the founding members of the National Association of Black Journalists. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 13, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2014_002 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Television and non-profit executive Allison Jeanne Davis was born on April 7, 1953 in New York, New York to Doris Nelson and Walter Davis. She graduated from Boston University with her B.S. degree in journalism in 1975.

Upon graduation, Davis was hired as a writer and producer for WBZ-TV in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1978, she was hired at KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she worked as an on-air reporter. From 1981 to 1998, Davis was employed at NBC, where she served as a writer-producer and as an executive producer for NBC News and MSNBC.com. At NBC, Davis built the original team of “cyberjournalists” overseeing the first original news content on the internet. She also helped launch MSNBC and, from 1994 through 1997, she served as the first executive producer of MSNBC on the Internet. Davis developed, wrote and produced *The Scholastic-NBC News Video* from 1993 until 1997. She also worked as a writer and producer for NBC News’ *Today*, as well as a producer for the NBC News broadcasts *Monitor*, *First Camera*, and *NBC Nightly News*. From 1998 to 2004, Davis served as senior vice president/creative of CBS and Dunbar Productions. At CBS, she created and executive produced the public television series “The Reading Club”. Then, from 2004 until 2009, Davis worked as vice president, chief operating officer, and special assistant to the Jackie Robinson Foundation's chief executive. In 2008, she founded Coopty Productions, which provides organizations with video production services. Davis was then appointed director of communications and media at New York’s Riverside Church in 2009, and, in 2011, she returned to the Jackie Robinson Foundation, where she was hired as director of communications and worked on the promotion for the Jackie Robinson movie *42*. Davis has also been an adjunct professor at CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism, Howard University’s School of Communications and the City College of New York.

Davis was a founding member of the National Association of Black Journalists, where she served as its first parliamentarian, and later as its vice president. She was also on the founding board of the National Visionary Leadership Project, an oral history project established by Camille Cosby, and serves on the board of Poets &

Writers.

Davis has received numerous awards and honors, including two Women in Communications Awards and several Emmy nominations. She also received Boston University's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2009, has received the University's Alumni Award for Service to Profession twice, and has been a National News Emmys judge since 2009. Davis also contributed to the 2001 book *Global News Perspectives on the Information Age*, edited by Tony Silvia.

Davis and her husband, Robert G. Wright, live in Teaneck, N.J. They are the parents of two sons: Tyler and Cooper.

Allison Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 13, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Allison J. Davis was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 13, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television executive and non-profit executive Allison J. Davis (1953 -) was an executive producer for NBC News and MSNBC, and senior executive of CBS, Dunbar Productions and the Jackie Robinson Foundation. She was one of the founding members of the National Association of Black Journalists.

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:

Davis, Allison Jeanne, 1953-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Davis, Allison Jeanne, 1953---Interviews

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Non-profit Executive

Television Executive

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 Allison J. Davis, January 13, 2014. 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 Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_001, TRT: 1:29:04 ?

Allison J. Davis was born on April 7, 1953 in New York City to Doris Nelson and Walter Davis. Her maternal grandparents immigrated to New York from Jamaica in the early 1900s and her grandfather worked as a ship cook. Davis' mother attended Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia and Lincoln School for Nurses at Lincoln Hospital. Davis' paternal grandparents immigrated to the United States from St. Kitts. Her paternal grandfather was a truck driver and owned a trucking company in Harlem, New York City. Davis' father served in Europe during World War II. Under the GI Bill, he graduated from Columbia University in 1955 and worked as a skycap, becoming active in the labor movement. When Davis was in kindergarten, her family moved from Harlem to Teaneck, New Jersey. Davis talks about Teaneck's voluntary busing program and her father's commute to Chicago, Illinois where he was the International Vice President of the Transport Workers Union. As a child, Davis was hospitalized with tuberculosis.

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

African American mothers.

Virginia State University.

African American grandparents.

African American fathers.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_002, TRT: 2:30:08 ?

Allison J. Davis attended William Bryant School in Teaneck, New Jersey, excelling academically, participating in Student Council, and learning Robert's Rules of Orders. She also played softball, baseball, and football with the boys. Davis describes her favorite teacher, Elizabeth Nostas, and her relationship with her brothers, Walter and Philip Davis. She has fond memories of holiday celebrations with her family. Davis' father, Walter Davis, was a good friend of Bayard Rustin and an activist in the Civil Rights Movement who was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to start the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. As a youth, Walter Davis met Senator John F. Kennedy while working as a skycap at LaGuardia Airport. Years later, his civil rights activism would bring him face-to-face with President Kennedy in the White House with labor leaders like George Meany. Davis also describes about her Caribbean ancestry, food she ate as a child, and her personality.

Education, Primary--New Jersey.

Mentoring in education.

African American families.

African American fathers.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

Caribbean Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_003, TRT: 3:29:04 ?

Allison J. Davis talks about moving to a white neighborhood in Silver Spring, Maryland after her father's appointment to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Davis describes her mother's social life which included one or two State dinners at the White House even though Davis' family believes that her father was on Nixon's Enemies List. Due to his work in Washington, D.C., Davis' father missed some developments in his children's upbringing. Davis remembers political family discussions and her increasingly radical political ideology. She followed the Black Panther Party as a student at Springbrook High School and became involved with Black Panther activities as a student at Boston University in Massachusetts. In high school, Davis wanted to become a journalist, working on the school paper until she graduated in 1971. Davis reflects upon her father's concerns for the black trade unionist movement. She also chronicles her brother's education and her experiences at Boston University.

United States. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Race relations--Maryland.

African American fathers.

Black Panther Party.

Education, Secondary--Maryland.

Boston University.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_004, TRT: 4:27:50 ?

Allison J. Davis was involved with the Nation of Islam at Boston University in Massachusetts, but later left because of its complementarian emphasis. Davis graduated a semester early from Boston University in 1974 and then began working at WBZ-TV as a producer for the show "First For News". At WBZ, Davis was mentored by news director Bill Aber and worked with anchors like Gail Harris, Pat Mitchell, and Jack Williams. There were few African Americans at WBZ. Her investigative reporting of on-duty drinking in the Boston Police Department placed her on WBZ's "I-Team" in Boston. She was then asked to start an I-Team at WBZ's sister station, KDKA, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1975, Davis became an original member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), founded by HistoryMaker Chuck Stone. Other original members included HistoryMakers Vernon Jarrett, Paul Brock, Frances Ward, Sam Ford, Sandra Long Weaver, and DeWayne Wickham. Davis talks about the NABJ's vision and Chuck Stone's leadership.

Nation of Islam.

Boston University.

WBZ-TV 4 (Television station : Boston, Mass.)

National Association of Black Journalists.

Journalism--Massachusetts--Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_005, TRT: 5:28:10 ?

Allison J. Davis describes her husband, Robert Wright, a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War. Like Davis, Wright also attended Boston University in Massachusetts. His uncle, Bruce Wright, a judge and the author of "Black Robes, White Justice", previously dated Davis' mother. Many of Wright's relatives were public servants. Davis and her husband worked at KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where Davis partnered with investigative reporter

Charles Bosworth on the station's I-Team to produce a story on lottery corruption. Davis also produced a story on overweight police officers at KDKA before joining NBC in 1981 where she worked as a writer-producer on NBC's "Nightly News" with anchor John Chancellor. In 1983, Davis' interest in long-form reporting led her to NBC's "Monitor", a short-lived magazine show hosted by Lloyd Dobyns. Davis became a producer on NBC's, "Summer Sunday" for Linda Ellerbee, and also worked with Andrea Mitchell. She describes early lessons as a television news producer.

Husband and wife.

Television broadcasting--Pennsylvania--Pittsburg.

KDKA-TV (Television station : Pittsburgh, Pa.)

National Broadcasting Company.

Chancellor, John, 1927-1996.

Ellerbee, Linda 1944-

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_006, TRT: 6:31:56 ?

Allison J. Davis became a producer for the "Today Show" on NBC in 1984, while it was hosted by Bryant Gumbel and Jane Pauley. While producing the show, Davis was able to increase the coverage of stories important to African Americans, including the stories of HistoryMakers Lani Guinier, Dennis Paul Kimbro, and Bebe Moore Campbell. In 1986, Davis became a set writer for the show as well as a producer while pregnant with her first son, and describes her hectic production schedule as well as the birth of both of her children while working for the show. In 1985, Davis accompanied the "Today Show" to Cuba, where she interviewed JoAnne Chesimard; and, in 1992, she travelled to Harare and Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the Isle de Gorée in Senegal. Davis recalls NBC's purchase by General Electric in 1986 and how they made the news into a profitable business. She also reflects upon the obliviousness of reporters to the African American community, as well as the personality of anchor Bryant Gumbel.

Today show (Television program)

Working mothers.

African Americans in mass media.

Travel.

General Electric Company.

Gumbel, Bryant.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_007, TRT: 7:35:49 ?

Allison J. Davis discusses the hosts of the "Today Show" while she was producer, including Bryant Gumbel, Jane Pauley, Deborah Norville, and Katie Couric. She recalls a controversial leaked memo from Bryant Gumbel concerning Willard Scott and Gene Shallit in 1989. While writing for the "Today Show," Davis developed "Scholastic-NBC News Video" from 1993 until 1997, and began to push NBC News into the digital realm. In 1994, Davis created the NBC Supernet with developers Tom Rogers and Martin Yudkovitz. The NBC Supernet launched with Windows 95 and led to the development of cyberjournalism and MSNBC.com in 1996, for which Davis served as an executive producer until 1997. In 1997, Davis left NBC to run Bryant Gumbel's Dunbar Productions, where she created the television program "The Reading Club," hosted by HistoryMaker Renee Poussaint, and consulted on other TV shows. Davis recalls being at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. In 2002, Davis left CBS when it was bought by Paramount Studios.

Today show (Television program)

Gumbel, Bryant.

National Broadcasting Company.

Digital media.

Poussaint, Renee.

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_008, TRT: 8:32:00 ?

Allison J. Davis left the television industry in 2002 and began working in nonprofits including the Jackie Robinson Foundation, the Riverside Church, and the National Visionary Leadership Project, where Davis served as director of development. Davis reflects on the frustrations of communications work for nonprofits and on her experience with the Jackie Robinson Foundation during the making and promoting of the film “42” in 2013. Davis also taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism. She reflects on her family, lack of regrets, and the current state of televised and online news. She also reflects on her experiments in wirecasts, and the future of how to share stories outside of the confines of mass media.

Jackie Robinson Foundation.

Riverside Church (New York, N.Y.)

National Visionary Leadership Project.

Non-profit organizations--United States.

Howard University.

City University of New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Allison J. Davis, Section A2014_002_001_009, TRT: 9:06:29 ?

Allison J. Davis reflects upon how she would like to be remembered, her legacy, and her pride in her family.

African American families.