

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nathan McCall

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## 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>	McCall, Nathan
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 19, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:53:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Journalist and author Nathan McCall (1954 - ) worked as a reporter for The Washington Post from 1989 to 1997. He is the author of the autobiography, <i>Makes Me Wanna Holler</i> , which chronicles his journey from troubled youth to successful journalist. McCall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 19, 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_032
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist and author Nathan McCall was born on November 25, 1954 in Norfolk, Virginia to Lenora and J.L. McCall. After his parents divorced, he was raised by his mother and his stepfather, Bonnie Alvin. He graduated from Manor High School in Portsmouth, Virginia in 1973, and began attending college, but his participation in an armed robbery resulted in him being sent to prison for three years. After he was released, he began to turn his life around. His passion for writing led him to pursue a career in journalism, and he received his B.A. degree in journalism from Norfolk State University in 1981.

McCall's first job as a reporter was for the *The Virginian Pilot-Ledger Star* in Norfolk, Virginia. He also worked at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* before landing a job at *The Washington Post* in 1989. In 1994, McCall published his autobiography, *Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*, which chronicled his journey from troubled youth to successful journalist. This was followed by a book of essays on race relations, *What's Going On*, in 1997, and his first novel, *Them*, in 2007. In addition to writing, McCall also serves as a senior lecturer in the African American Studies Department at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

McCall's books have been the recipients of numerous awards and honors: *Makes Me Wanna Holler* was a *New York Times* bestseller and named the Blackboard Book of the Year for 1995. *Them* reached number one on the *Essence* magazine bestseller list and was one of *Publishers Weekly's* best books of 2007. In addition, the novel was a finalist for the 2008 Townsend Prize for Fiction, a nominee for the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence, and a finalist for the 2008 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Debut Fiction.

McCall has three children: Monroe, Ian, and Maya. He lives in Atlanta, Georgia with his wife.

Nathan McCall was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 19, 2014.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nathan McCall was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 19, 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist and author Nathan McCall (1954 - ) worked as a reporter for The Washington Post from 1989 to 1997. He is the author of the autobiography, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*, which chronicles his journey from troubled youth to successful journalist.

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# 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®.

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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.

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# Controlled Access Terms

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

## Persons:

McCall, Nathan

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McCall, Nathan--Interviews

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# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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## The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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### Occupations:

Journalist

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Author

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## 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 Nathan McCall, February 19, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:37 ?

Nathan McCall was born on November 25, 1954 in Norfolk, Virginia. His mother, Lenora Alvin, was born on December 13, 1935 in Laurinburg, North Carolina. McCall's maternal grandmother was a domestic worker and migrated to Norfolk, where she worked for a Jewish family until her retirement. McCall's

mother and biological father met and married when Lenora Alvin was a teenager; she gave birth to two sons before giving birth to McCall. She was a homemaker and occasionally worked in department stores. McCall's father, John McCall, was a longshoreman. The couple divorced when McCall was a toddler and McCall's mother remarried to Bonnie Alvin, a career U.S. Navy man, around 1958. Because of his Navy career, the family lived in Morocco for two years, followed by several more years in Key West, Florida. McCall talks about his older brothers and also recalls his earliest childhood memory in Morocco, his likeness to his mother, and a time he and his siblings were abandoned by their biological father.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:24 ?

Nathan McCall lived in Morocco as a child while his stepfather served in the U.S. Navy. The family moved from Morocco to Key West, Florida. McCall describes the international political climate in the 1960s, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, bomb drills, and Ku Klux Klan activity. McCall attended Douglass High School, which went from the first through twelfth grade, while living in Key West in the early 1960s. He recalls the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 and reactions to his death from his teacher and parents. After the third grade, McCall moved to Portsmouth, Virginia. He describes the city's black business and political scene and sharing a bedroom with four brothers and being disciplined by his stepfather. In the sixth grade, McCall integrated Alford J. Mapp Junior High School, where he was met with racism and hostility. McCall describes his childhood interests and aspirations and his parents' educational backgrounds, and also recalls his favorite teachers.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:29 ?

Nathan McCall describes being met with racial violence after integrating Alford J. Mapp Junior High School in Portsmouth, Virginia. McCall attended Mapp for one year, his sixth grade year, before transferring. McCall describes the trauma he experienced at Mapp, including being beaten by white students in class and on the bus rides to and from school. McCall's grades began to suffer and his parents took notice. He transferred to W.E. Waters Middle School, a newly built school in his neighborhood, Cavalier Manor. McCall shares the history of Cavalier Manor, which, at the time of the interview, was still a predominantly black neighborhood. McCall talks about his favorite teacher at Waters and the types of television and literature he was exposed to. McCall also talks about his best friend, Shellshock, and explains the nickname. He describes his sixth grade personality, his personal transformation during junior high school, and the formation of his street crew in Portsmouth.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:52 ?

Nathan McCall began spending time with a "street crew" in the summer of 1967. He explains how his crew operated and fought with other crews around their neighborhood in Portsmouth, Virginia and across town. McCall describes his style in junior high school and the types of music he enjoyed. McCall also talks about the direction his life took after finishing junior high school as described in his book, 'Makes Me Wanna Holler.' McCall became involved in fighting, robberies, and drugs. He began carrying a gun and, with his crew, sought revenge on the children who had traumatized him as a child by fighting white teenagers that passed through Cavalier Manor. He describes robberies he committed, both armed and unarmed. Despite all this, McCall remained in school at Woodrow Wilson High School while the rest of his crew dropped out. He also worked with his stepfather as a gardener in Portsmouth's predominantly white neighborhoods.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:34 ?

Nathan McCall received positive encouragement from his high school English teacher, even without acknowledging it. He describes his high school routine, which included spending time on the streets late into the night before returning home to study. 'Super Fly' was released in 1972 while McCall was in high school and had a significant influence on him and his peers. His best friend, Shellshock, was a drug dealer and increased his operation, and McCall began selling as well. McCall recalls his encounters with the law, including being arrested for stealing and gun possession. He transferred from Woodrow Wilson High School to the newly opened Manor High School for his senior year. His girlfriend at the time became pregnant and gave birth just after their graduation in 1973. McCall shot someone who had disrespected her at a carnival and turned himself in. He was sentenced to serve his time on the weekends and attend classes at Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Virginia during the week.

Video Oral History Interview with Nathan McCall, Section A2014\_032\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:38 ?

Nathan McCall describes his mental state while engaging in crime at twenty years old. McCall's mother attempted to get him help but he showed no interest. He describes committing robberies and ceasing to value life, including his own. McCall and several other young men attempted to rob a McDonald's in a predominantly white area in Norfolk, Virginia and were caught. McCall describes their arrest and their time in jail while awaiting bail. McCall was sentenced to twelve years while the other men involved were sentenced to eight —McCall had been arrested on a previous gun charge and was the gunman the night of the robbery. McCall describes reactions to his sentencing from his family and a philosophy professor from Norfolk State University. He also talks about professors that saw potential in him while he was enrolled in at Norfolk State.