

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John E. Davis

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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>	Davis, John E., 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 21, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:08:18).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast journalist and media executive John E. Davis (1947 - ), founder and president of John E. Davis Media, is best known for his Emmy-winning twenty-year career as a reporter and anchor for Chicago's WBBM-TV. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 21, 2014, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_259
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist and media executive John E. Davis was born on November 3, 1947 in Wichita Falls, Texas to Tommy Christian and Myrtle Donaldson. Davis was raised in Wichita Falls and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1966. He went on to attend Henderson County Junior College in Athens, Texas before transferring to Washington State University, where he received his B.S. degree in broadcast communications in 1970.

Upon graduation, Davis was hired as a news reporter for Fresno, California's KMJ-TV. In 1977, Davis moved to KGW-TV in Portland, Oregon, where he served as a news reporter and anchor until 1982. Then, for the next twenty years, he worked as a general assignment reporter and later as a weekend anchor for Chicago, Illinois' WBBM-TV. During his time at WBBM, Davis became the first United States news reporter to interview Nelson Mandela after he was released from prison in 1990. In addition to his work on television, Davis served as a news director and anchor for WVAZ Radio, and has hosted a real estate show on WLS-AM Radio and WIND-AM Radio.

In 2003, Davis founded and served as president of John E. Davis Media, a firm that serves politicians, corporate executives, celebrities and athletes by providing them high-end political consulting, media crisis management and public speaking coaching. Through his media company, Davis has worked on numerous political campaigns, including Scott Lee Cohen for Governor of Illinois; the Terrence J. O'Brien Campaign for Cook County Board President; Howard B. Brookins, Jr.'s Campaign for Cook County State's Attorney; and Dorothy Brown's Campaign for Mayor of Chicago.

Davis has earned many honors throughout his career, including a 1988 local Emmy Award for his coverage of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's death; an Ada S. McKinley Youth Services Mentor of the Year Award; the Better Communicator Award from the League of Black Women; and a Monarch Award for Outstanding

Communicator. He has served as a board member of the Harold Washington Library and of the Greek-American Rehabilitation and Care Centre, and as a charter member of the Saltpond Redevelopment Institute and member of the We Care model program of the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Police Department.

John E. Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 21, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John E. Davis was conducted by Harriette Cole on October 21, 2014, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist and media executive John E. Davis (1947 - ), founder and president of John E. Davis Media, is best known for his Emmy-winning twenty-year career as a reporter and anchor for Chicago's WBBM-TV.

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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:

Davis, John E., 1947-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Champagne, Curt (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, John E., 1947---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:

Broadcast Journalist

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Media Executive

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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 John E. Davis, October 21, 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 John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:35 ?

John E. Davis was born on November 3, 1947 in Wichita Falls, Texas to Myrtle Donaldson and Tommy Christian. Davis' parents met in Wichita Falls in the 1940s. His mother had Davis at sixteen years old. Soon after his birth, his father left to play football at Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, then joined the U.S. Army and served in the Korean War. Davis did not see his father again until he was a teenager. During his childhood, Davis' mother worked as a domestic in Wichita Falls. Davis lived with his maternal grandparents in Wichita Falls before moving across town to live with his mother and stepfather, Felley Donaldson. His earliest memories are of watching adults play dominos on Friday nights at his grandparents' house while his grandmother cooked large meals. Davis recalls visiting his maternal great-grandmother, Ludie Warren, in Cooper, Texas. She worked as a field laborer and a domestic. Davis describes her as a very spiritual woman who commanded great respect in the community.

Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:17 ?

John E. Davis alternated between living with his maternal grandparents and his parents throughout his childhood in Wichita Falls, Texas. His stepfather, worked as a domestic for wealthy oil and cattle barons in north Texas. Davis completed his elementary through high school education at segregated schools, all named Booker T. Washington, in Wichita Falls. After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in 1966, he enrolled at Henderson County Junior College on a football scholarship. He played the quarterback position. After Henderson won the 1966 junior college national championship game, Davis was offered a scholarship to Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. There he studied broadcast journalism. Washington State was integrated by the late 1960s, but he recalls lingering discriminatory attitudes in the surrounding community. He describes the guidance the black student union received from Dr. Johnnetta Cole and the members' discussions about the needs of black students at WSU.

Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_003, TRT: 3:31:28 ?

John E. Davis was in high school when John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. He reunited with his father, Tommy Christian, in Los Angeles, California as a teenager. His father aspired to play for the Los Angeles Rams, but Davis never had a desire to play professional football. As an undergraduate at Washington State University in the late 1960s, Davis was the only African American student in the broadcast journalism department. He met his wife, who is Greek, in college and they had their first child. Davis recalls Dr. Johnnetta Cole's guidance on campus after the 1968 assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Davis received his B.S. degree in broadcast communications from Washington State in 1970. After briefly pursuing a music career, he joined the news team at KMJ-TV in Fresno, California. In 1977, he left to work at KGW-TV in Portland, Oregon. While at KGW, Davis covered the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. In 1982, he interviewed for and accepted a position with CBS in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:21 ?

John E. Davis and his wife, Maria Ioannidou Davis, who is Greek, spent the early years of their marriage in the ethnically diverse city of Fresno, California, while Davis worked at KMJ-TV. When the couple moved to Chicago, Illinois in the early 1980s, they continued to encourage cross-cultural interactions in their home. Davis began reporting for WBBM-TV, the Chicago CBS affiliate, in 1982. Fellow journalists taught him how to build relationships with various city constituencies. Although journalists such as Emory King and Edwina Moore had

preceded him, he still received a warm welcome from a black CBS cameraman. Davis was the primary CBS correspondent for Harold Washington's 1983 Chicago mayoral campaign and benefited from Washington's attempts to cultivate a stronger relationship between black journalists and city hall. He describes how Washington used the media to his advantage. Davis won a local Emmy Award in 1988 for his coverage of Washington, who he covered until Washington's death in 1987.

Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_005, TRT: 5:26:37 ?

John E. Davis traveled to South Africa for WBBM-TV, the Chicago CBS affiliate, in February 1990 to report on the end of apartheid. On the day of his arrival, he witnessed an attack by police on a peaceful demonstration outside St. Mary's Anglican Cathedral in Johannesburg. During the trip, on a tip from a hotel bellman who was a member of the African National Congress, Davis traveled to Cape Town the weekend Nelson Mandela was released from prison and met with Mandela in the Cape Town mayor's office. He was the first American news correspondent to interview Mandela. Davis and CBS anchor Dan Rather, subsequently interviewed Mandela at Mandela's home in Soweto, South Africa. Davis was also granted permission to interview former president Frederik Willem de Klerk. After twenty-three years with CBS, the news organization decided not to renew Davis' contract in 2003. He founded John E. Davis Media the same year. He works as a media consultant for Chicago politicians.

Video Oral History Interview with John E. Davis, Section A2014\_259\_001\_006, TRT: 6:39:00 ?

John E. Davis canvassed for HistoryMaker Barack Obama in Indiana during the 2008 presidential campaign. He was in Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois on November 4, 2008 when the final poll results announced Obama as the next president of the United States. Davis briefly did radio programming for two Chicago stations. John E. Davis Media, his political and media consulting company, comprises most of his work. Since 1977, Davis has made an annual trip to Greece. He reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He talks about lessons he taught his children and the regrets of his life. Davis concludes by narrating his photographs.