

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bebe Moore Campbell

---

## 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>	Campbell, Bebe Moore, 1950-2006
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bebe Moore Campbell,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 3, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:21:09).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fiction writer Bebe Moore Campbell (1950 - 2006 ) wrote eight books throughout her career, three of which became New York Times Best Sellers. Her awards included a 1978 Professional Woman's Literature Award and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature grant, which she received in 1980. Campbell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 3, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_226
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author Bebe Moore Campbell was born on February 19, 1950, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Doris Edwina Carter Moore and George Linwood Peter Moore. Campbell's parents were well educated, and her father, a war veteran, was permanently paralyzed in an auto accident the year Campbell was born. Campbell's parents separated in 1953, and she went on to live with her mother and maternal grandmother in Philadelphia during the school year and her father in North Carolina during the summer. Her experiences growing up in both the North and South gave her a unique perspective on racial segregation in the United States.

Campbell attended Philadelphia's Girls High School and upon graduation was admitted to the University of Pittsburgh where she was the only African American in her dorm. Feeling isolated, Campbell decided to join the Black Action Society and tutor local elementary school children; she graduated with her B.S. degree in elementary education in 1972, and began teaching in the Atlanta public schools. In 1975, Campbell moved to Washington, D.C., where she continued to teach; after enrolling in a class led by Toni Cade Bambara, a renowned African American author, Campbell abandoned teaching to become a writer.

In the mid-1970s, Campbell was published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Essence, Ebony and Seventeen, among other publications; she also appeared as a regular commentator on National Public Radio. Campbell's books were often informed by her own experiences and engaged with issues of interpersonal relationships. Campbell's first book, a fictional work entitled Successful Women, Angry Men: Backlash in the Two Career Marriage, was an analysis of the relationship between a woman's career and her marriage. Sweet Summer: Growing up With and Without My Dad, her second book, was a memoir of her childhood in a divorced family. Her most critically acclaimed novel, Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, was an exploration of southern racism and the conflicts sparked by the murder of a fifteen-year-old boy; the book won an NAACP Image Award and was named a New York Times Notable book for 1992.

Campbell wrote eight books, three of which became New York Times best sellers; her awards included a 1978 Professional Woman's Literature Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature grant, which she received in 1980.

Campbell lived in Los Angeles with her husband, Ellis, and had two children, Ellis Gordon, III, and Maia Campbell, now a successful actress.

Campbell passed away on November 27, 2006 at age 56.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bebe Moore Campbell was conducted by Paul Brock on October 3, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fiction writer Bebe Moore Campbell (1950 - 2006 ) wrote eight books throughout her career, three of which became New York Times Best Sellers. Her awards included a 1978 Professional Woman's Literature Award and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature grant, which she received in 1980.

---

## 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:

Campbell, Bebe Moore, 1950-2006

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Campbell, Bebe Moore, 1950-2006--Interviews

---

African American women authors--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Fiction Writer

---

## 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 Bebe Moore Campbell, October 3, 2005. 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 Bebe Moore Campbell, Section A2005\_226\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Bebe Moore Campbell was born on February 18, 1950 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Doris Carter Moore and George Moore. Campbell's paternal grandfather, Nathaniel Moore, was an itinerate pastor, and her grandmother, Mary Moore Griffin, was of Native American and African American descent. Campbell's maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Williams Carter, was born in 1902 in South Boston, Virginia. Campbell's mother was born in 1922 in Camden, New Jersey. She attended William Penn High School and the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. After obtaining her master's degrees in social work and sociology, Campbell's mother became a social worker. Campbell's father was born in 1920 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina and grew up with his ten siblings on a farm. He attended P.W. Moore High School and served in World War II as the only African American in his regiment. Campbell's parents met at Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church in Philadelphia. Campbell also explains how she was named after her aunt, Bebe Carter.

African American women authors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Bebe Moore Campbell, Section A2005\_226\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Bebe Moore Campbell's parents married in 1945. Campbell's father attended Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina in Greensboro, where he majored in agriculture, becoming a county farm agent. In 1950, Campbell's father was paralyzed from the waist down in a car accident. After returning to Philadelphia to live with Campbell's maternal grandmother, Campbell's parents separated, and her father moved back to North Carolina. He later returned to Philadelphia and worked with Goodwill. Campbell was raised in North Philadelphia, where she played with her cousin and other neighborhood children and attended Corinthian Baptist Church of Germantown. At James Logan Elementary School, she took creative writing classes. After moving to the West Oak Lane neighborhood, Campbell enrolled at General Louis Wagner Junior High School. Campbell reminisces about getting into trouble with her elementary school teacher, her sixth grade graduation, and avoiding a school bully.

Video Oral History Interview with Bebe Moore Campbell, Section A2005\_226\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Bebe Moore Campbell watched boxing matches with her mother and grandmother and was a fan of Floyd Patterson, Jersey Joe Walcott, and Archie Moore. She recalls sitting in a classroom by herself in kindergarten as a punishment while the other children went to recess. Moving to a predominately white neighborhood and attending General Louis Wagner Junior High School made Campbell aware of the social differences between her classmates. Campbell attended the academically rigorous Philadelphia High School for Girls, where she struggled in math, French, and chemistry, but improved with the help of a tutor. Campbell admired her high school principal and vice principal, who were Ph.D.s, and became aware of black elitism. Because of her mother's wish to pay for her college, Campbell attended the more affordable University of Pittsburgh instead of Boston University. On campus, she joined the Black Action Society and dance groups and tutored at the local elementary

schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Bebe Moore Campbell, Section A2005\_226\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Bebe Moore Campbell was traveling to Howard University's homecoming when she broke her back in a car accident. After recovering, she returned to the University of Pittsburgh, where she studied African American literature, was active in the Black Action Society and tutored African American students. Although Campbell aspired to be a writer and entrepreneur, she went into education. While teaching at an elementary school in Atlanta, she attended author Toni Cade Bambara's writing workshop. Upon moving to Washington, D.C., Campbell taught at an adult education center and joined novelist John Oliver Killens' workshop. In 1976, the same year her daughter actress Maia Campbell was born, Campbell had her first short story published in Essence magazine. Finding it difficult to sell fiction, Campbell wrote articles for Black Enterprise, Ebony and The Washington Post. Campbell reflects upon her admiration for Harriet Tubman and the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on her parents' careers and on her college campus.

Video Oral History Interview with Bebe Moore Campbell, Section A2005\_226\_001\_005, TRT: 0:25:35 ?

Bebe Moore Campbell was Black Enterprise magazine's Washington, D.C. correspondent. In 1985, Campbell wrote about two-career marriages for Savvy magazine. Her article was so popular that she wrote a follow-up book, 'Successful Women, Angry Men.' Campbell's second book, 'Sweet Summer,' was published in 1989. Campbell then wrote her first novel, 'Your Blues Ain't Like Mine,' which was The New York Times Notable Book of the Year and a NAACP Image Award winner. Campbell's other works of fiction include 'Singing in the Comeback Choir,' 'What You Owe Me,' '72 Hour Hold' and 'Brothers and Sisters,' which made the New York Times Bestsellers list. Campbell describes her children's books, 'Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry,' 'Sometimes I Get So Hungry,' and 'Stompin' at the Savoy.' She reflects upon her husband's support and how she hopes to be remembered. Campbell co-founded the Los Angeles chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. She shares her advice for families of people with mental illnesses.