

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Luther "Badman" Keith

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Keith, Luther Badman
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith,
Dates:	March 9, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:17:01).
Abstract:	Newspaper editor Luther "Badman" Keith (1950 -) writes for the Detroit News and created On Detroit, a weekly grassroots newspaper. He is also a blues musician know as Luther "Badman" Keith. Keith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 9, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_080
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Luther Alton Keith was born on October 9, 1950 in Detroit, Michigan to Mittie Savella Ashworth and Luther Caesar Keith. Keith's father was a postal employee who founded the United Committee on Negro History. Keith attended Sampson and St. Agnes elementary schools. He graduated from Cathedral High School in 1968. He then studied at the University of Detroit, where he was mentored by Mary Helen Washington and graduated with a B.A. degree in journalism in 1972.

Hired by *The Detroit News* in 1972, Keith served as a general assignment reporter before becoming a sportswriter in 1973. In 1979, Keith worked as the state capital bureau correspondent specializing in economic and budget issues and writing periodic columns on state legislative issues. He was also a frequent commentator on the "Off The Record" television program. Keith was appointed assistant city editor in 1982 where he directed local coverage in the criminal courts and directed a five-person news team.

Taking a two year leave of absence, Keith served as founding director of Wayne State University's Journalism Institute for Minorities from 1985 to 1987. He returned to *The Detroit News* as Assistant City Editor in 1987 and Night City Editor in 1988. From 1988 to 2005, Keith worked in a number of positions for *The Detroit News*, including features writer, copy editor, business editor, assistant managing editor, public editor, senior editor and columnist. Keith was the recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award from Wayne State University in 1987 and the Ameritech Living the Dream Trailblazer Award in 1999, Keith became the youngest person ever to be inducted into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame in 1995. In 1993, Keith created *On Detroit*, a weekly grassroots mini newspaper that ran until 2003. He was honored with the Excellence in Urban Media Award from the Detroit Chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists in 2001 and Wayne State's Helen Thomas Diversity in Journalism Award in 2005.

Keith, inspired by Luther Allison and mentored by James Soberg of the Luther Allison Band, started playing the

blues guitar in 1981. He now performs internationally as Luther “Badman” Keith. Keith has produced several CD’s including, *Badman and Thunder in My Blues*. In 2006, he founded and served as executive director of Arise Detroit, a broad-based volunteer coalition that addresses illiteracy, high school dropout rates, crime, youth violence, drug abuse, domestic abuse, neighborhood blight and unemployment.

Keith and his wife, Jacqueline, have one child, Erin.

Keith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 9, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Luther "Badman" Keith was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 9, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper editor Luther "Badman" Keith (1950 -) writes for the Detroit News and created On Detroit, a weekly grassroots newspaper. He is also a blues musician know as Luther "Badman" Keith.

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:

Keith, Luther Badman

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Keith, Luther Badman--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Detroit news (Detroit, Mich. : 1905)

Occupations:

Newspaper Editor

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 Luther "Badman" Keith, March 9, 2007. 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 Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_001, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith describes his family background and upbringing in Detroit, Michigan. His mother, Mittie Ashworth Keith, was born in 1912 in Wilson County, Tennessee to farmers John and Luella Ashworth, whom Keith recalls visiting as a child. Mittie attended teaching college in Wilson County before working at a defense industry plant in Detroit. There, she met Keith's father, Luther Caesar Keith. Luther Caesar was born in 1905 in Atlanta, Georgia to Perry Alexander Keith and Lucille Collier, who died in childbirth. Perry, the grandchild of a slave and her master, was a successful businessman on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta before moving to Detroit to work in a factory. There, he and his second wife, Annie, had several children, including HistoryMaker Damon J. Keith. Luther Caesar, a postal worker, was a leader in Detroit's African American community. A devout Catholic, he once hosted African Cardinal Laurean Rugambwa in his home. He was a strong influence on the young Luther Keith, born October 9, 1950.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_002, TRT: 0:29:52 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith recalls his childhood in Detroit, Michigan. He describes his parents' personalities and how he takes after his mother. While growing up on Northfield Avenue in Detroit, Keith attended kindergarten at Sampson Elementary School before moving to the city's west side. After the move, Keith attended St. Agnes Elementary School where he became an avid reader and writer. He describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood as well as the rhythm of community life in Detroit, which was interrupted by the 1967 Detroit riot. During the riot, Keith came dangerously close to the violence while riding in a car with his white baseball coach. His family's shoe repairman, Armenian immigrant Krikor "George" Messerlian, was beaten to death by looters. Keith also remembers being stopped and interrogated by U.S. National Guard. He describes learning about the accomplishments of prominent African Americans from his father. Keith went on to Cathedral High School, an all-boys Catholic high school.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_003, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith was raised in Detroit, Michigan where he attended St. Agnes Elementary School and Cathedral High School, both Catholic schools in which the majority of his teachers and classmates were white. Keith describes fair complexion in his family and about his own blue eyes and fair skin. Upon graduating from high school in 1968, he received a scholarship from an anonymous donor through the Project 100 program to attend the University of Detroit, a Jesuit school. In college, Keith played recreational baseball, wrote for the school newspaper, and received his B.A. degree in journalism in 1972. One of his literature professors was Mary Helen Washington. Keith talks about his first job at Hudson's Department Store in Detroit and delivering newspapers at the Detroit News in college. He describes the joint operating agreement between the Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press. His uncle, HistoryMaker Damon J. Keith, helped him get an apprentice reporter position with the Detroit News.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_004, TRT:

0:28:57 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith describes his reporting career at the Detroit News. Starting as an apprentice reporter, he was paid less than an intern. However, he defied the low expectations his superiors had of an African American writer and was promoted to sports writing. As a sports writer, Keith wrote about basketball player Ervin Johnson, boxer Tommy Hearns, and boxing coach Emanuel Steward. In 1978, Keith was asked to cover the Michigan gubernatorial election. Proving himself a capable politics writer, he was made the lead state capitol correspondent for the Detroit News. He held this position in Lansing, Michigan until 1982, when he was named Assistant City Editor back in Detroit, becoming the paper's first African American editor. Keith talks about the Journalism Institute for Minorities, which he founded in 1985, and about his best stories. He also talks about creating "On Detroit," a public interest section to promote positive news in the community, and about his political column in the Detroit News.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_005, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith talks about his journalism career in Detroit, Michigan and about his blues music. By the time he left the Detroit News in 2005, he was a senior editor and columnist. He talks about his colleagues and mentors including HistoryMakers Angelo Henderson, and expresses concern over the lack of diversity in the newsroom. In the early 1980s, when he was a political correspondent for the Detroit News in Lansing, Michigan, Keith became interested in blues and purchased several albums by blues artist Luther Allison. After seeing Allison perform, Keith purchased a guitar and learned to play. He attended several of Allison's shows, and the two eventually became friends. One night, at Soup Kitchen Saloon in Detroit, Allison asked Keith to join him on stage, and the crowd enjoyed his set. Keith continued playing for over a decade, releasing his first album in 1999, two years after Allison's death. He describes the origin of his nickname, performing in Belgium in 2000, and the themes in his music.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_006, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith briefly describes his blues style, and then talks about his nonprofit organization, Arise Detroit. Arise aims to serve the Detroit, Michigan community by coordinating the efforts of numerous small service organizations toward common goals, such as reducing violence and increasing economic opportunity. Keith believes the largest obstacles preventing the city's social problems from being solved are a lack of individual initiative, and poor coordination between groups. He talks about Arise Detroit's programs and its partnerships with other service organizations. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Reflecting upon his life, Keith explains what he would do differently.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_001_007, TRT: 0:19:40 ?

Luther "Badman" Keith reflects upon his life. He also talks briefly about his resemblance to boxer Muhammad Ali. Keith expresses his intention to continue with his nonprofit organization, Arise Detroit. He talks about his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section A2007_080_Keith_Luther_06_MED_001, TRT: 1:08:22

Video Oral History Interview with Luther "Badman" Keith, Section
A2007_080_Keith_Luther_06_MED_002, TRT: 1:01:23