

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Antwone Fisher

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Fisher, Antwone Quenton
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher,
Dates:	April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2008
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:31:35).
Abstract:	Screenwriter Antwone Fisher (1959 -) wrote the screenplay for "Antwone Fisher", a film adaptation of his autobiography, "Finding Fish". His other screenwriting credits include "ATL", "Rush Hour", and "Money Talks". Fisher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_150
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Screenwriter and author Antwone Quenton Fisher was born on August 3, 1959 in a women's prison outside of Cleveland, Ohio to seventeen-year-old Eva Mae Fisher and twenty-three-year-old Edward Elkins. His mother named him for pianist Antoine "Fats" Domino, and his father was killed before he was born. As a result, Fisher grew up in several foster homes, without having known his parents. Twelve years of his childhood were spent with a foster family named the Picketts, a middle-aged couple whose children were already grown. During his time with the Picketts, Fisher was beaten physically, sexually abused by a neighbor and family friend, and emotionally neglected. For many years, his foster father did not even acknowledge whether he knew Fisher's name. After one fight with Mrs. Pickett, Fisher was kicked out of the home and forced to return to social services.

For high school, Fisher attended George Junior Republic School, a specialized school for young men from disadvantaged circumstances located in western Pennsylvania. While attending school, he met social worker Bill Ward, who was a significant and positive influence in Fisher's life. When Fisher graduated, he moved into a Cleveland YMCA. Seeking protection for the numerous predators in the neighborhood, Fisher entered into the criminal world of Cleveland by collecting money from prostitutes for a local pimp named Butch. For the latter half of 1977, Fisher was homeless and slept wherever he could find some shelter, usually on the campus of Cleveland State University.

Fisher joined the United States Navy in 1978, where he spent eleven years in the service. He began to receive counseling from a Naval psychiatrist, Lieutenant Commander Williams. Williams helped motivate Fisher to discover his own origins. After his discharge from the Navy, Fisher became a federal corrections officer for the Federal Bureau of Prisons for three years. He then began working as a security guard for Sony Pictures, and resolved to discover the whereabouts of his biological family. After some research, Fisher contacted his aunt, Annette Elkins and was able to meet his biological family, including his mother, Eva Mae. In 1996, Fisher married his wife, LaNette Fisher, with whom he has two children.

In 2001, Fisher published his autobiography, *Finding Fish*. After this, Fisher fielded several competing offers for the film rights. After declining several offers, he ultimately sold the rights to his story to 20th Century Fox. Shortly thereafter, the film *Antwone Fisher* was released with actor Derek Luke portraying the title character. The film was directed by Denzel Washington, who portrayed Commander Williams. Fisher's other writing credits include work on the films *Money Talks*, *Rush Hour* and *ATL*. In 2005, Fisher released a book of his own poetry entitled *Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?*

Antwone Fisher was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Antwone Fisher was conducted by Larry Crowe and Paul Brock on April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 10 Betacam SP videocassettes. Screenwriter Antwone Fisher (1959 -) wrote the screenplay for "Antwone Fisher", a film adaptation of his autobiography, "Finding Fish". His other screenwriting credits include "ATL", "Rush Hour", and "Money Talks".

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:

Fisher, Antwone Quenton

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Fisher, Antwone Quenton--Interviews

African American screenwriters--Interviews.

African American sailors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Screenwriter

HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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 Antwone Fisher, April 19, 2007 and September 19, 2008. 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 Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_001, TRT: 0:26:42 ?

Antwone Fisher was born on August 3, 1959 in Delaware, Ohio to Eva Fisher and Edward Elkins. His paternal family had Choctaw ancestry. Fisher's paternal great-grandmother, Ida Jolif, worked on a casino boat, where she raised his grandfather, Horace Elkins. She was given a share in an oil company, but was denied her claim to the company profits because she was a black woman. Upon her death, Fisher's paternal grandfather was offered a cash settlement, but refused, preferring that the company honor the share agreement. He became a podiatrist in Cleveland, Ohio; and, with his wife, Emma Elkins, raised eight children, including Fisher's father, who was born in Forrest City, Arkansas. Fisher's mother grew up in the foster care system, and was sent to a women's correctional facility at the time of his birth. Fisher was first placed in the foster care of Nellie Strange; but, fearing that Strange was too attached to Fisher, social services placed him with Queen McDonald Pack and Cronie Pack when he was two years old.

African American grandparents.

African American children--Ohio--Cleveland.

Foster children--Ohio--Cleveland.

Foster home care--Ohio.

Children of women prisoners--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_002, TRT: 0:27:52 ?

Antwone Fisher's foster father, Cronie Pack, practiced holistic medicine in Laurel, Mississippi, until the Ku Klux Klan threatened him with revenge for a white woman who died after receiving treatment from him. He and his wife, Queen McDonald Pack, then moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where he became the minister of a small church. They had nine biological children and three foster children, including Valencia Dixon and Wayne Bell. They also housed Vietnam War veterans for additional money. While Fisher recalls celebrating the Fourth of July, Christmas and Thanksgiving with the Packs, he also recalls enduring physical, sexual and emotional abuse from Mrs. Pack and her children, which was overlooked by his thirteen caseworkers. A shy child lacking self-confidence, Fisher was teased at school for his darker complexion. Rather than endure the bullying, he skipped class and spent his time in Turtle Park in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Fisher recalls refusing to attend church or eat game meat, like raccoon and possum.

Foster home care--Ohio.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Veterans--Mental health.

Adult child abuse victims--United States.

Child sexual abuse--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_003, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

Antwone Fisher's foster father, Cronie Pack, worked for the Yoder Company in

Cleveland, Ohio; and, upon retiring, started a landscaping company. Fisher and his foster brother, Wayne Bell, sometimes accompanied him on jobs. Growing up in an all-black community, Fisher was unaware of racial discrimination, and his foster family did not talk about the Civil Rights Movement. Fisher's foster family criticized Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and labeled him a troublemaker, but mourned his death. In the 1970s, Fisher learned about the Civil Rights Movement from the Black Panther Party and black nationalists who had opened offices in his neighborhood. Fisher describes the neighborhood of Glenville in Cleveland, and local businesses like Stroh's Brewery Company, Fisher Body Corporation and White Motor Company. During the Christmas season, Fisher enjoyed the Christmas tree, candy and food, but never received gifts from his foster parents. Fisher also remembers the death of his foster sister, Valencia Dixon.

Foster home care--Psychological aspects.

Sexually abused children--Ohio.

Foster children--Family relationships.

Civil rights movements--Press coverage--United States.

Adult child abuse victims--United States.

Criminal behavior--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_004, TRT: 0:28:31 ?

Antwone Fisher grew up in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. He was a good student, but lacked support from his teachers and foster parents. He began skipping class with his friends, and his grades suffered. Fisher talks about how he and his foster siblings, Wayne Bell and Valencia Dixon, coped with abuse at the Pack home, and how it impacted their lives. Dixon was bullied by Mrs. Pack, and raped by a local pastor who lived with the Pack family. When she became pregnant, Mrs. Pack forced her to have an illegal abortion, which left Dixon unable to have children. Fisher describes Bell, who spent nineteen years in prison, as an intelligent person who was hardened by his circumstances. He recalls Bell's positive response to his depiction in Fisher's autobiography, 'Finding Fish.' Fisher also describes his foster brother, Kevin, who briefly lived with the Packs before returning to his mother. Fisher later learned that Kevin set fire to his mother's home after being sexually assaulted by her friend.

Child sexual abuse by clergy--United States.

Racially mixed children--Psychological aspects.

Foster children--Psychological aspects.

Sexually abused children--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_001_005, TRT: 0:28:41 ?

Antwone Fisher was given the responsibility of caring for Vietnam War veterans who lived with Fisher's foster parents, Queen McDonald Pack and Cronie Pack. When Fisher was fourteen years old, his foster mother sent him back to social services, where he learned about his biological parents. Then, Fisher was placed in Metzenbaum Children's Center in Cleveland, Ohio, where he experienced racism for the first time, and fought a white boy who called him a derogatory term. Fisher was then sent to the majority-white George Junior Republic reform school in Grove City, Pennsylvania. While there, Fisher began listening to rock bands like the James Gang, and realized that he had a talent for drawing and painting. He earned a scholarship to the San Francisco Art Institute in California, but did not attend, because he could not afford the cost of housing. Fisher graduated from George Junior Republic at seventeen years old. He also remembers Uncle Dave, a counselor at the school, who became his mentor.

African American teenage boys--Attitudes.
High school students--United States--Attitudes.
Boys--Societies and clubs--Ohio.
George Junior Republic (Grove City, Pa.).
Dyslexic children--United States.
Foster home care--Ohio--Cleveland.
Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_006, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Antwone Fisher was labelled as a juvenile delinquent when his case was transferred to the juvenile justice department, and he was sent to the George Junior Republic reform school in Grove City, Pennsylvania. Upon graduating in 1977, Fisher was emancipated from the foster care system at seventeen years old. Bill Ward, one of Fisher's school counselors, drove him to a YMCA in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, where Fisher rented a room. Equipped with vocational skills in car repair and food services, Fisher began searching for work, but was continuously rejected because he lacked job experience, and employers were hesitant to hire someone who appeared to be a juvenile delinquent. After being harassed by other residents at the YMCA, Fisher left to work with a pimp collecting money from the pimp's prostitutes. The pimp mentored him about how to operate a business, dress well and take care of himself. Fisher quit after being attacked by the pimp, and learning that the pimp was abusing children.

George Junior Republic (Grove City, Pa.)
Social workers--Pennsylvania.
Prostitution--Ohio--Cleveland.
Drug dealers--Ohio--Cleveland.
Cleveland (Ohio)--Social conditions--20th century.
Homelessness--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_007, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Antwone Fisher became homeless after leaving the YMCA. He returned to his childhood neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio, where he became reacquainted with his childhood friend, Jesse. He lived with Jesse's family, until Jesse was killed during a robbery. Fisher became homeless again, and refused help from his foster sister, Valencia Dixon. He recalls stealing a coat from a student at Cleveland State University, where he later received an honorary degree. Fisher was homeless for six months before deciding to join the U.S. Navy. Upon hearing his story, the recruiters quickly assigned him to Naval Station Great Lakes in Lake County, Illinois for basic training. After graduating from the naval academy in 1978, Fisher was stationed in San Diego, California on the U.S.S. Schenectady, LST-1185. At first, Fisher had difficulty adjusting to regimented navy life. After numerous fights, he was sent to Lieutenant Commander Williams, a U.S. Navy psychiatrist who helped him cope with his traumatic childhood.

Homelessness--Ohio--Cleveland.
Violent crime--Ohio--Cleveland.
Post-traumatic stress disorder in adolescence.
United States. Navy--Recruiting, enlistment, etc.
United States. Navy--African Americans.

African American sailors.

Psychotherapy.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_008, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Antwone Fisher travelled to Hong Kong and Japan while enlisted in the U.S. Navy. After serving eleven years as a ship serviceman and gun mounter, Fisher retired and worked at the Federal Correctional Institution, Terminal Island in San Pedro, California. He then became a security guard at Sony Pictures Entertainment in Culver City, California. During this time, Fisher began searching for his biological father's family, and found his paternal aunt, Annette Elkins, in the phonebook. He learned that his cousin was William Elkins, Jr., the deputy mayor of Los Angeles, California. He reunited with his biological family for Thanksgiving in Cleveland, Ohio, and met his half-siblings. He also met his maternal uncle, Jess Fisher, who introduced him to his biological mother, Eva Fisher. Fisher returned to Los Angeles, and shared his story with his coworkers, who encouraged him to write a screenplay based on his life. After showing the script to movie producer Todd Black, Fisher was hired as a screenwriter.

Military service.

United States. Navy--African Americans.

United States. Bureau of Prisons--Officials and employees.

Sony Pictures Entertainment, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_009, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Antwone Fisher worked as a security guard at Sony Pictures Entertainment before becoming a screenwriter for Universal Pictures, HBO and New Line Cinema. The movie 'Antwone Fisher,' released in 2002, was written by Fisher and starred Derek Luke and Denzel Washington, who also directed. Fisher talks about the opening scene of 'Antwone Fisher,' which included people from his childhood like his grade school teacher, Brenda Profit. Fisher reflects upon his success as a writer and screenwriter. He describes his mother's brother, Jess Fisher; and how he met his wife, LaNette Canister Fisher, on the Sony Pictures Entertainment lot. Fisher published his autobiography, 'Finding Fish,' in 2001. He also published a book of poetry called 'Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?' in 2003, and 'A Boy Should Know How to Tie a Tie: And Other Lessons for Succeeding in Life' in 2010. His poem, "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy," was featured in Nikki Giovanni's book, 'Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat.'

African American motion picture producers and directors.

Dyslexics.

Biographical films.

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation.

Washington, Denzel, 1954-

Motion picture industry--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Antwone Fisher, Section A2007_150_002_010, TRT: 0:12:55 ?

Antwone Fisher describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and his legacy of bringing attention to major issues in the foster care system. Fisher also talks about being a vegetarian. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

African American screenwriters.

African American poets.

Giovanni, Nikki.

African Americans--Conduct of life.