

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wade Hudson

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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>	Hudson, Wade
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 28, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:06:46).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fiction writer and book publishing executive Wade Hudson (1946 - ) published children's books. Hudson was the co-founder of Just Us Books, Inc. and the developer of AFRO-BETS kids books. He served as president of the company, managing the business and marketing aspects. Hudson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 28, 2007, in East Orange, New Jersey. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_173
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Children's book publisher and author Wade Hudson, Jr. was born on October 23, 1946 in Mansfield, Louisiana, the first of eight children to Wade and Lurline Hudson. Hudson grew up in Mansfield and attended Desoto High School, graduating in 1964. He went on to attend Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1960s. Hudson worked for several civil rights organizations in the South and was one of the "Baton Rouge Three," three African American men falsely arrested because of their involvement with civil rights activities. He has also worked as a newspaper reporter, a public relations specialist and served as executive director of Pure Energy Music Publishing, a music publishing company he owned with his brothers. The company gave Madonna the hit song, "Holiday." Hudson earned a certificate from the Channel 13 film and television program in New York City in 1975. The program was established to provide opportunities for minorities in the film and television industry. Hudson is also an established playwright, having authored a number of plays that have been performed on the professional stage. They include *Sam Carter Belongs Here*, *A House Divided* and *A Black Love Story*.

Hudson met his wife, Cheryl Willis Hudson, in 1971, while visiting Boston, Massachusetts. The couple was married in 1972 in Portsmouth, Virginia, Cheryl Hudson's hometown. They gave birth to their first child, Katura in 1976. Unable to find African American art to adorn their daughter's nursery, Mrs. Hudson decided to create her own designs. Ultimately, she was inspired to create a children's book, and although she and Hudson attempted to shop it around to various publishing companies, they were unsuccessful. In 1982, the couple's second child, Stephan J. Hudson, was born, and three years later, the Hudson's again revived their idea of creating African American children's art.

In 1985, the Hudsons developed the *AFRO-BETS kids*, black characters who twist themselves into the shape of the alphabet. Two years later, after further rejections from various publishers, they invested \$7,000 and self-published

*AFRO-BETS ABC*, which featured the *AFRO-BETS Kids*. The couple received attention from leading education magazines and black bookstores, which carried the books. After the AFRO-BETS books sold out within three months, the Hudsons decided to establish their own publishing company, Just Us Books, Inc. It is now one of the most successful Black owned publishing companies in the world, publishing books and educational material for children focusing on black history, experiences and culture. Just Us Books, Inc. is the only Black owned publishing company that focuses exclusively on publishing Black interest books for children and young adults.

Hudson serves as president of the company, managing the business and marketing responsibilities, while Cheryl handles serves as editor. Because of Hudson's marketing success with Just Us Books, major companies such as Harper Collins and Scholastic, Inc. hired him as a marketing consultant to boost their sales in the African American market. In 1990, Just Us Books, Inc. introduced a bi-monthly newspaper for young people entitled *Harambee*, which would later win a Parent's Choice Award. The company landed its first major account, a \$40,000 order with Toys 'R'Us. Throughout the 1990s, the couple continued publishing critically acclaimed children's literature, including *Afro-Bets Book of Black Heroes* (1989), the company's biggest seller to date, *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin* (1990) and *Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs and Kid Caramel*, the first contemporary mystery series that would focus on young, black male characters. In 1997, *Income Opportunities* Magazine named Hudson and his wife, "Small Business Pioneers of the Year." The Hudsons have received many awards for their contributions to young people, literature and to their community. In 2004, the Hudsons began the Sankofa imprint, which publishes books by outstanding African American writers and authors that are no longer in print. Books by such noted authors as James Haskins, Rosa Guy, Camille Yarbrough and Eleanora E. Tate have been republished.

Hudson is also a celebrated author. His books have been published by his own company and by publishers such as Scholastic, Abingdon Press and Children's Press. Some of the books authored by Hudson include *Powerful Words: More Than Two Hundred Years of Extraordinary Writing by African Americans*, *Pass It On, African American Poetry for Children*, *Jamal's Busy Day* and *The Underground Railroad*. He has received numerous awards and honors, including the Stephen Crane Award for his writing, and he was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent in 2004. Hudson serves on many boards, including the Langston Hughes Library at the Children's Defense Fund and he is a Deacon at his church, Imani Baptist Church in East Orange, New Jersey. He lectures around the country on topics such as writing, publishing, black history and culture and black empowerment.

Wade Hudson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 28, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wade Hudson was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 28, 2007, in East Orange, New Jersey, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fiction writer and book publishing executive Wade Hudson (1946 - ) published children's books. Hudson was the co-founder of Just Us Books, Inc. and the developer of AFRO-BETS kids books. He served as president of the company, managing the business and marketing aspects.

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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:

- Hudson, Wade
- Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)
- Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
- Hudson, Wade--Interviews
- Publishers and publishing--Interviews.
- Hudson, Wade--Interviews.
- African American 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 Wade Hudson, April 28, 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).

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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 Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Wade Hudson was born on October 23, 1946 in Mansfield, Louisiana to Lurline Jones Hudson and Wade Hudson, Sr. His father was born in Bernice, Louisiana, and moved as a child to Mansfield. There, Hudson's mother was born to sharecroppers Bernice Jones and Theodore Jones. His mother received little formal education, as she often did not attend school during the harvest. In Mansfield, most African Americans were agricultural laborers, and lived in a close-knit community, where monthly church services were the primary social gatherings. As in much of rural Louisiana, racial discrimination was widespread in Mansfield. African Americans were prevented from voting, and some of Hudson's maternal family were beaten by the police. Most public institutions were segregated, including the Mansfield Theater. On one occasion, while waiting to see a movie there, Hudson witnessed an altercation between a white police officer and African American man after the officer struck the man's sister.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Wade Hudson's paternal grandmother, Geneva Johnson, separated from his grandfather, and moved with Hudson's father, Wade Hudson, Sr., to Mansfield, Louisiana. There, she was regarded as one of the most educated women in the African American community, as she had completed the ninth grade. In Mansfield, Hudson's father went on to work as a laborer, and marry Hudson's

mother. Hudson's parents raised him in rural Mansfield, where the Baptist church was the heart of the community. At thirteen years old, Hudson became active at Elizabeth Baptist Church, after spending two weeks on the mourner's bench, and then being baptized in the nearby pond in front of his family and community. In addition, Hudson played baseball every day with the neighborhood children in Mansfield, and eventually established his own Little League team. Hudson began his education at Mansfield's all-black DeSoto Parish Training School, where he was encouraged by his teachers to achieve academically and attend college.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Wade Hudson served as the assistant secretary at Elizabeth Baptist Church in Mansfield, Louisiana at the request of Pastor M.B. Bass, who hoped Hudson would become a minister. However, Hudson did not aspire to join the church, but instead to become a professional baseball player. While a student at Mansfield's DeSoto High School, he began writing poems and short stories, and soon aspired to a career as an author. Through literature, Hudson learned about the problem of institutionalized racism; and, hoping to invoke change, he wrote letters to Senator Robert F. Kennedy and animator Walt Disney. He also submitted articles that were often published in the Shreveport Sun. Hudson graduated in 1964, and matriculated at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. With his classmates, Hudson founded the Society for Opportunity, Unity and Leadership, which led protests and voter registration drives in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Wade Hudson attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. While there, he left the Baptist church, and turned towards the more socially active teachings of Malcolm X. On campus, Hudson joined several civil rights groups, and established his own organization, the Society for Opportunity, Unity and Leadership, Inc. (SOUL). He participated in demonstrations against the school's conservative, state-controlled administration; and, with SOUL, operated a free breakfast program and tutorials for poor children in Baton Rouge. The programs were modelled on the social activism of the Black Panther Party, and soon attracted attention from the FBI. In 1970, Hudson and his fellow SOUL members, Frank Stewart and Alphonse Snedecor, were arrested for conspiracy to murder several Baton Rouge politicians, including Mayor Woody Dumas, based on taped conversations obtained by infiltrators from the FBI's COINTELPRO program. While Hudson was released due to a lack of evidence, both Stewart and Snedecor were charged.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:28 ?

Wade Hudson began his writing career as sports columnist and editor at the Baton Rouge News Leader. Soon, he was drafted into the Vietnam War, and fled from Louisiana to California, but was caught. Pretending to be mentally unstable, Hudson was sent to a U.S. Army psychiatrist, who was sympathetic to his desire to avoid the war, and gave him a 1-Y medical dispensation. Then, in 1971, Hudson visited Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he met Cheryl Willis Hudson. They married one year later, and settled in Cambridge, where Hudson worked as a playwright at the People's Theatre. They moved to East Orange, New Jersey after Hudson was accepted to WNET-TV's film and television school in New York City. Later, Hudson returned to writing, and published his first children's book, 'Beebe's Lonely Saturday,' through the New Dimension press. In 1987, he and Willis Hudson founded the Just Us Books, Inc. publishing company, and began publishing African American children's books.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_006, TRT: 0:27:55 ?

Wade Hudson was the executive director of Pure Energy Music Publishing, Inc., a company he co-owned with his brothers. After selling the hit song 'Holiday' to Madonna, they dissolved the company, and liquidated its catalog of songs. Hudson's brother, Curtis Hudson, had written the song for Madonna after meeting her during a performance at the Paradise Garage in New York City. In 1987, Hudson and his wife, Cheryl Willis Hudson, founded the Just Us Books, Inc. publishing company, where Hudson served as the CEO and head of marketing. The corporation was the first black-owned publishing company directed exclusively at young African American readers. Hudson published several of his own books through the company, and collaborated with the Scholastic Corporation on numerous book projects. Following the birth of his daughter, Katura J. Hudson, Hudson returned to the church, and became a deacon. He also reflects upon his awards, his impact on future generations and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Wade Hudson, Section A2007\_173\_001\_007, TRT: 0:08:12 ?

Wade Hudson narrates his photographs.