

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Harris

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harris, James, 1948-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Harris,
Dates:	August 28, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:50).
Abstract:	Hairstylist James Harris (1948 -) was the first African American member of Intercoiffure, and the founder of the Hair Fashion Group. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 28, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_241
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Hair stylist James Harris was born on October 20, 1948, in Boston, Massachusetts, to Emma J. Jones-Harris, a supervisor for the Boston City Hospitals, and Grover Harris, owner of a demolition and trucking company. His aunt was a hairdresser and his uncle was a barber. By the time Harris was twelve years old, he knew that he wanted to become a hair stylist. Harris attended the Newman Preparatory School High School for Boys in Boston, Massachusetts. He and a friend purchased wigs wholesale and sold them while in high school, and at the age of eighteen, Harris had his first paying client.

After graduating from high school in 1967, Harris he started a career as a hair stylist. He toured the United States with Summit Labs, an African American hair care manufacturing company. In 1972, Harris was a member of the first African American team to win an International Beauty Show. Harris earned a degree from La Newton School of Beauty in Roxbury, Massachusetts, developed products with Revlon and opened his first salon, the Libra Studio, in Mattapan, Massachusetts, all in 1974. In efforts to revolutionize the hair industry, Harris established the Hairmetrics hair care training center with stylist Olive Benson that same year. Hairmetrics was the first advanced hair training center in the world. Shortly after the opening of Hairmetrics, Harris sold his Boston salon and moved to New York in 1977 to become the styles director for Soul Scissors, the country's first black salon chain. In 1980, Harris helped create Shear Energy, an advanced hair designing system for excessively curly hair. That next year, he started working with Glemby International Beauty Salons as president of the Black Hair Is line. In 1991, Harris became the first African American male member of Intercoiffure, an organization of elite hair stylists and salon owners. He stayed at Glemby International Beauty Salons until 1997, when he opened the Mahogany Door Beauty Center & Spa in Harlem. After three years, he left the salon and started working at L'Oreal in a variety of capacities. He remained with L'Oreal until 2007, when he decided to return to the salon industry and established the James Harris Salon in Boston and New York.

Harris is the founder of the African American stylists' organization, Hair Fashion Group. He participated in fashion shows in South Africa, Cote d'Ivoire, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil and other countries. He has collaborated

with celebrities such as Diana Ross, Tyra Banks, Nancy Wilson and Patti LaBelle as well as designers Patrick Kelly, Betsey Johnson and Gucci.

James Harris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 27, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Harris was conducted by Adrienne Jones on August 28, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Hairstylist James Harris (1948 -) was the first African American member of Intercoiffure, and the founder of the Hair Fashion Group.

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:

Harris, James, 1948-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Harris, James, 1948- --Interviews

African American hairdressing--interviews.

Hairdressing of African Americans--interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Hair Stylist

HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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 James Harris, August 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).

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 James Harris, Section A2007_241_001_001, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

James Harris was born on October 20, 1948 in Boston, Massachusetts to Emma Jones Harris and Grover Harris. Harris' maternal grandmother, Essie Jones, grew up South Carolina, where Harris' mother was born in Charleston. His mother was one of thirteen siblings, and eventually moved with her family to Jacksonville, Florida, where she graduated from high school. Harris' paternal grandmother, Mary Harris, was Native American, and gave birth to his father in Okathor, Georgia. They also moved to Jacksonville, where Harris' parents met and married. His parents moved to Boston's Madison Park neighborhood in 1940; and, when Harris was six years old, his family briefly relocated to Newark, New Jersey. After one year, they returned to Boston. There, Harris was influenced by his aunt and uncle, who were friends of Malcolm X and Minister Louis Farrakhan; and joined the Nation of Islam in the late 1950s. Harris also remembers visiting Jacksonville, where he experienced southern segregation as a child.

African American families--Massachusetts--Boston.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Massachusetts--Boston.

Race relations--Florida--Jacksonville.

Racism--Massachusetts--Boston.

African American fathers.

African Americans--Religion.

African American children.

Hairdressing.

Video Oral History Interview with James Harris, Section A2007_241_001_002, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

James Harris grew up in the all-black Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. He began his education at Boston's St. John School; and, at that time, aspired to become an entertainer. He went on to attend the integrated Oliver Wendell Holmes School during his junior high school years. Around the age of twelve years old, Harris learned hairdressing from his maternal aunt, Viola Jones. He went on to enroll at Boston's Hyde Park High School, and began selling wigs. He obtained a position at a local salon; and, after graduating from Boston's Newman School for Boys, became a stylist at a barbershop owned by his maternal uncle, John Jones. He briefly attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, but left to pursue his aspiration to work in the hair industry. Harris began training in 1967 at the Wilfred Academy of Hair and Beauty Culture in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He graduated in 1974, and opened his first salon in Boston's Mattapan Square.

Hairdressing of African Americans.

African American children--Massachusetts--Boston.

Beauty shops--United States.

African Americans--Relations with Irish Americans.

Race relations--Massachusetts--Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with James Harris, Section A2007_241_001_003, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

James Harris met stylist Camillo Casimir at a hairdressing competition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Together, they travelled to Paris, France, where Harris met Ebony Fashion Fair creators Eunice Johnson and Audrey Lavinia Smaltz. Harris then returned to Boston, Massachusetts, where he opened the Libra Studios salon, and the Hairmetrics training center with Olive Lee Benson.

He continued to enter competitions like the International Beauty Show, and won more awards than any other African American stylist. Eventually, Harris was recruited by Irving Bottner to join the professional products division of Revlon Inc., where he focused on black hair products. He also founded Shear Energy, an advanced education course on design techniques for curly hair. After leaving Revlon Inc., Harris opened a salon in New York City's Harlem neighborhood at 125th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. He also developed a line of hair products with supermodel Naomi Sims during the 1980s.

Beauty culture--Study and teaching--New York(State)--New York.

Beauty shops--New York(State)--New York.

Beauty shops--Employees.

Hairdressing of African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with James Harris, Section A2007_241_001_004, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

James Harris was the owner of the Mahogany Door Beauty Center and Spa in New York City. During his career in the hairstyling industry, Harris worked with numerous black celebrities, including supermodel Naomi Campbell. He also made appearances on talk shows like 'Ricki Lake' and 'The Montel Williams Show.' In 1991, Harris became the first African American member of Intercoiffure, a professional organization for hairstylists. He went on to establish the Hair Fashion Group for African American stylists with his colleague, Johnny Gentry. Harris describes his hopes for the organization, and for African American professionals in the hair industry. He also talks about his mentorship of younger colleagues, like makeup artist Sam Fine. Harris concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

African Americans--Color--Social aspects.

Hairdressing of African Americans.

Beauty shops--Management.