

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lynn Norment

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Norment, Lynn, 1952-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment,
Dates:	February 6, 2008 and January 20, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2008 and 2012
Physical Description:	11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:25:08).
Abstract:	Magazine editor Lynn Norment (1952 -) was the senior staff editor for Ebony Magazine. She wrote and edited various columns for the magazine including "Sisterspeak," "Ebony Advisor" and "Money Talks." Norment also served as the National Association of Black Journalists' vice president and on several of its committees. Norment was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 6, 2008 and January 20, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_012
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ebony Magazine Senior Staff Editor Lynn Aurelia Norment was born in Bolivar, Tennessee. Norment was born the third child in a family of nine to Alex Norment and Esther Morrow Norment. Her father was the owner of a local appliance sales and repair shop called Norment's Radio and T.V., and her mother worked as a licensed practical nurse at Western State Hospital. During her elementary school years, Norment attended the all black segregated school in Bolivar known as Bolivar Industrial Elementary. Norment went on to the vocational school where she was a member of the Beta Club and the school's newspaper staff. In 1969, the racial integration of Tennessee schools offered Bolivar's African American community the opportunity to transfer to the predominantly white Bolivar High School. Norment was amongst those who helped to integrate the high school. She graduated from Bolivar High School in 1970.

Later, in the fall of 1970, Norment attended Memphis State University where she received a full academic scholarship. Norment graduated magna cum laude in 1973 with her B.A. degree in journalism and then worked as an intern for the Memphis based newspaper, The Commercial Appeal. From 1973 to 1977, Norment was a general assignment reporter, religion editor and investigative reporter. In 1977, she went off to Chicago to pursue work as a freelance writer for Ebony Magazine. Ebony agreed to hire Norment and assigned her to write an update story on R&B singer Al Green. Norment followed Al Green for two days, without the use of a recorder or a notepad, to complete the story.

In 1991, Memphis State University honored Norment by recognizing her as one of its "Outstanding Journalism Alumni." A member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), Norment was chairperson for NABJ's 1997 Convention in Chicago which was attended by President William J. Clinton. In 2000, Norment was chosen as NABJ's chairperson for the association's 25th Anniversary. She now serves as NABJ's vice president and is on several of its committees. In addition, Norment is a board member of a Chicago based rehabilitation agency,

Habilitative Systems, Inc.

Norment lives in Chicago, Illinois and serves as a member on the Editorial Board of Ebony Magazine. She writes and edits various columns for Ebony Magazine including "Sisterspeak," "Ebony Advisor" and "Money Talks."

Norment was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 6, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lynn Norment was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Larry Crowe on February 6, 2008 and January 20, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine editor Lynn Norment (1952 -) was the senior staff editor for Ebony Magazine. She wrote and edited various columns for the magazine including "Sisterspeak," "Ebony Advisor" and "Money Talks." Norment also served as the National Association of Black Journalists' vice president and on several of its committees.

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:

Norment, Lynn, 1952-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Norment, Lynn, 1952- --Interviews

African American journalists--Interviews

Women journalists--Interviews

Periodical editors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine 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 Lynn Norment, February 6, 2008 and January 20, 2012. 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 Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Lynn Norment was born on February 13, 1952 in Bolivar, Tennessee to Esther Morrow Norment and Alex Norment. Her mother was the oldest of sixteen children born to sharecroppers in Whiteville, Tennessee, and trained as a nurse after she finished high school. Norment's father grew up on his family's cotton farm near Whiteville, and helped raise livestock. After the death of his father, Major Norment, he left the eighth grade to become the primary caretaker for his seven younger siblings. Norment grew up on her paternal grandparents' farm until she was five years old. At that point, her family moved to an African American neighborhood in Bolivar. During the summers, she visited her maternal family in St. Louis, Missouri, even after her mother's untimely death. In addition to his full-time occupation at a tannery, Norment's father owned a television and radio repair store in Bolivar, where he also sold records. Norment and her four sisters often helped manage the store after school and on weekends. African American journalists--Interviews.

Women journalists--Interviews.

Periodical editors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Lynn Norment's family was well known in Bolivar, Tennessee because of her aunts and uncles, who were local educators. Norment's father, Alex Norment, was outspoken on issues of inequality, and taught his daughters the importance of self-respect. When Norment was ten years old, her mother, Esther Morrow Norment, died suddenly of pancreatic cancer. Norment's extended family offered to care for her and her sisters, but Norment's father firmly refused. He and his subsequent wife, Lula Smith Norment, raised the five sisters, who took on chores around the house such as cooking and cleaning. In the wake of her mother's death, Norment became an avid reader, which fostered her early love of writing. She was an excellent student at Bolivar Industrial School and later at Bolivar Central High School. In ninth grade, Norment was one of only three African Americans to win a statewide essay contest, for which the prize was a visit to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and a trip to Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Lynn Norment sang in the choir at Greater Springfield Missionary Baptist Church, while her father, Alex Norment, served as a deacon and Sunday school superintendent. Although Norment and her sisters occasionally patronized the segregated movie theater, their father urged them to support local black-owned businesses instead. During a trip to Cape Canaveral, Florida, she experienced veiled segregation when she was forced to room with the only other African American girl in attendance. Upon entering tenth grade, Norment decided to

take advantage of the new voluntary desegregation program in Bolivar. She transferred from Bolivar Industrial High School to the primarily white Bolivar Central High School. The Civil Rights Movement became prominent in town during the 1960s and Norment's father encouraged her to participate in the nonviolent protests. After her graduation in 1970, Norment opted to attend Memphis State University. She recalls placing third in Miss Bronze West Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Lynn Norment attended Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee, where she made the dean's list in her first semester, and joined the staff of the school newspaper. Norment initially planned to pledge Delta Sigma Theta Sorority like her older sister, but decided not to join Greek life on campus. She attended many of the university's basketball games; and in her last year, watched the team rank second in the NCAA championships. Norment majored in journalism and aspired to become a writer, even though her father, Alex Norment, encouraged her to become a doctor. She was particularly influenced by the writing of Angela Davis, Nikki Giovanni, and Gwendolyn Brooks, who she met years later in Chicago, Illinois. While pursuing her bachelor's degree, Norment worked as an intern for The Commercial Appeal newspaper. On her first day, she met Congressman Harold Ford, Sr., and interviewed community members following a shooting in south Memphis. She remembers her father's strict rules.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_001_005, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

Lynn Norment visited Memphis, Tennessee and St. Louis, Missouri with her family as a young girl, and returned to Memphis years later as a journalism student at Memphis State University. She graduated in 1973, and worked full-time at The Commercial Appeal newspaper. Norment and a white colleague began an investigation of discriminatory housing practices in the city. Despite receiving threats, Norment published the story, which earned her the respect of the city's African American leaders such as Reverend Samuel Billy Kyles, civil rights activist Maxine Smith and lawyer Walter Bailey, Jr. During a trip to Chicago, Illinois, Norment toured the offices of Ebony, and offered to contribute stories from Memphis. She was assigned to interview singer Al Green about an attack in his home. Norment and Green spent the day together, and she was the first to report about the church he had started. After she sent the story to Ebony, Norment was asked to join the magazine as an assistant editor in 1977.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_006, TRT: 6:29:11 ?

Lynn Norment visited the offices of Ebony magazine while in Chicago, Illinois. Prior to the trip, her friend, Memphis Judge D'Army Bailey, connected her with Ebony's executive editor, Herbert Nipson. Norment, who worked at The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tennessee at the time, offered to write freelance articles for Ebony; and was asked to interview Al Green. Green had been attacked in his home by a former girlfriend a year prior, and Norment was tasked with writing a follow up article about the event. She spent the day with Green on his farm near Memphis, and learned that he had founded a church. Norment's story was the first to cover the news, and Ebony hired her as assistant editor. She moved to Chicago in 1977, and was mentored by Charles L. Sanders, Vernon Jarrett and Lerone Bennett. She also interacted with publisher John H. Johnson often. Norment became involved with the Chicago Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Black Journalists.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_007, TRT: 7:33:29 ?

Lynn Norment contributed several articles for the children's magazine, Ebony,

Jr!, while working for Ebony, and frequently pitched her own story ideas. As she gained respect with the publication, Norment began to conduct more celebrity interviews. She secured an interview with up-and-coming singer Whitney Houston, and became her primary contact at the magazine. During her first photo shoot with Whitney Houston, Norment had not known to provide clothes, and acquired a wardrobe on short notice. She went on to interview Houston's mother, Cissy Houston, for a Mother's Day issue. Over her career with the magazine, Norment interviewed stars like Al Green, Tina Turner, Beyoncé Knowles and Spike Lee. Ebony approached celebrity stories with a more intimate, personal angle, and Norment became friendly with several of her subjects like singer Anita Baker, whom she interviewed during a tumultuous time in Baker's life. Norment describes her relationship column.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_008, TRT: 8:29:32 ?

Lynn Norment interviewed Tina Turner following her split from Ike Turner, and again after Turner gained popularity in Europe. Norment also interviewed Queen Latifah as the rapper transitioned into an acting career; and Spike Lee at the start of his film career. She was instrumental in the creation of Ebony's 'Young Leaders' section, which featured Lee as a promising graduate student at New York University. She went on to interview him several times, including after his first major movie, 'She's Gotta Have It.' Given the high profile status of some of her interview subjects, Norment helped coordinate a number of photo shoots for cover stories, and handled requests for certain stylists, makeup artists or photographers. At Ebony, she worked frequently with photographers like Moneta Sleet and Vandell Cobb. Some of Norment's interviews showcased celebrity homes, keeping in line with Ebony's tradition of showing its readers more intimate glances into celebrities' lives. She also describes her writing process.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_009, TRT: 9:28:59 ?

Lynn Norment was contacted by Mariah Carey's publicist, who asked Norment to do a story on her other client, Destiny's Child. Norment interviewed the original members, including Beyonce Knowles, and met Knowles' mother, Tina Knowles, who designed the outfits for the photo shoot. Over the following years, Norment interviewed Knowles several times, and also wrote features on Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams' solo careers. She interviewed Denzel Washington on the set of Spike Lee's 'Mo' Better Blues,' and came to know him as a family man. Although Norment typically requested an hour to interview, she learned how to produce a strong story under unfavorable conditions. For a Mothers' Day issue in Ebony, Norment wrote about Michael Jordan and his mother, Deloris Jordan, even though the basketball star could only spare a few minutes. Norment's work for Ebony also included editorials on interracial dating trends, although her executive editor, Lerone Bennett, deemed some of her topics too controversial.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_010, TRT: 10:30:32 ?

Lynn Norment covered the 1983 election of Chicago, Illinois' first African American mayor, Harold Washington, and attended his inauguration. As president of the Chicago Association of Black Journalists, she interacted with the mayor several times. She also served on the board of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and arranged for Washington to speak at the national conference in Miami, Florida. Decades later, Norment met Barack Obama, and had the opportunity to interview him and Michelle Obama just prior to the announcement of his campaign for president of the United States. At this point in the interview, she addresses common criticisms against President

Obama. Norment remained active in NABJ, and befriended several the Chicago Defender's publishers and editors, including Theresa Fambro Hooks, Earl Calloway and Roland Martin. She was inducted into the NABJ Hall of Fame in 2009, honored by her alma mater, University of Memphis and presented with the key to her hometown of Bolivar, Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Norment, Section A2008_012_002_011, TRT: 11:26:55 ?

Lynn Norment interviewed actor Will Smith several times for Ebony, and visited musician Lenny Kravitz at his home in the Bahamas, which was far more modest than she had expected. She secured a rare interview with Prince and met with him in the South of France, where he was filming 'Under the Cherry Moon.' Upon retiring from Ebony in 2009, Norment started writing a book about her journalism career. She also began working for Carol H. Williams Advertising, an African American advertising agency. Norment's volunteer activities include Habilitative Systems, Inc., a social service organization that served Chicago's West Side community. Norment shares advice for aspiring journalists, hopes and concerns for the African American community; and talks about the impact of online publications. She also reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered.