

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Tim Reid

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Reid, Tim, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid,
Dates:	February 9, 2012 and January 18, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2012 and 2013
Physical Description:	14 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:36:07).
Abstract:	Film actor Tim Reid (1944 -) is the co-founder New Millennium Studios with his wife Daphne Maxwell Reid, and founder of Legacy Media Institute. Reid was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 2012 and January 18, 2013, in Petersburg, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_067
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor, writer, producer and director Timothy L. Reid was born on December 19, 1944 in Norfolk, Virginia. As a teenager growing up in Norfolk, Reid dealt with the horrors of segregation during the height of the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia's Tidewater area. In 1968, at the age of twenty-three, Reid received his B.A. degree in business administration from Norfolk State University.

After college, Reid moved to Chicago, taking a position as one of the first black marketing representatives with DuPont Corporation. That year, as part of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Harvey, Illinois, Reid met Tom Dreesen, a white native of Chicago's South Side. Devastated by the high rates of drug abuse and violence among Harvey's teenagers, Dreesen and Reid developed an anti-drug program for students. After a presentation in 1969, an eighth-grade student told the duo she thought they were funny, and should become comedians. Receptive to the idea, the duo began to write comedic material, and formed Tim and Tom, arguably the first interracial comedic duo. Reid and Dreesen toured from 1971 to 1975, before disbanding to pursue other interests.

In 1976, Reid moved to Los Angeles, and picked up regular work on various television shows. He was subsequently cast on the Richard Pryor Show. Due to controversy and creative differences between NBC and the show's namesake, the show was cancelled after only four episodes. A year later, however, Reid landed a spot on a hit show, playing DJ Gordon "Venus Flytrap" Sims on *WKRP in Cincinnati*. After the show was canceled in 1982, Reid joined the cast of another successful series, the detective drama *Simon & Simon*. In 1987, Reid earned critical acclaim as the co-creator, producer, writer and lead actor of *Frank's Place*, a dramedy that involves the exploits of a college professor who inherits a New Orleans restaurant. Lasting twenty-two episodes, the show earned Reid several award nominations, winning an NAACP Image Award. Reid returned to television in 1993 with *Sister, Sister*, which starred twins Tia and Tamera Mowrey and actress Jackee Harry. Reid remained with the show for its entire six-year run. In 1995, Reid made his film directorial debut with the critically acclaimed feature film, *Once Upon A Time...When We Were Colored*.

In 1997, Reid co-founded New Millennium Studios with his wife, actress Daphne Maxwell Reid. In 2009, Reid established the Legacy Media Institute to train emerging filmmakers around the world. Reid has also remained active in the community, donating his time for various charitable activities.

Timothy L. Reid was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 9, 2012 & January 18, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Tim Reid was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 9, 2012 and January 18, 2013, in Petersburg, Virginia, and was recorded on 14 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Film actor Tim Reid (1944 -) is the co-founder New Millennium Studios with his wife Daphne Maxwell Reid, and founder of Legacy Media Institute.

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:

Reid, Tim, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Reid, Tim, 1944---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

New Millennium Studios Motion Pictures

Occupations:

Film Actor

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 Tim Reid, February 9, 2012 and January 18, 2013. 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 Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_001, TRT: 1:29:00 ?

Tim Reid was born on December 19, 1944 in Norfolk, Virginia. His mother, Augustine Wilkins, born in 1922 in Norfolk, was given away at birth. Growing up in the segregated South, she was able to pass as white. She dropped out of high school and gave birth to Reid when she was twenty-one. Reid's father, William Reid, was born in 1916 in Whaleyville, Virginia and grew up on a sharecropping farm. He played baseball in the Negro Leagues and for the U.S. Navy during World War II; he met Reid's mother while on leave. Because he was married, Reid's mother kept the identity of Reid's father a secret. In the early 1950s, Reid's paternal grandmother, Beulah Reid, was born to a family with several brothers in Whaleyville, where Reid spent part of his summers. She took in Reid and disclosed his father's identity. She owned a boarding house and raised Reid until his father adopted him. Reid developed an interest in storytelling while constructing tales for his family members.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_002, TRT: 2:28:58 ?

Tim Reid grew up in poverty in Norfolk, Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland with his mother and her second husband, George Bright, a heroin addict whose name Reid adopted as a young child. In Baltimore, he attended a Catholic grade school, where he was punished. Upon finding out, his mother accosted the nun who harmed him. Reid returned to Norfolk to live with his paternal grandmother, who instilled in Reid a sense of survival. He attended Laurie E. Titus Elementary School, and got into trouble at William Henry Ruffner Junior High School. Instead of attending reform school, Reid was turned over to his father, a well-respected man in Norfolk, for discipline. At Crestwood High School, a segregated school, Reid benefited from diverse classes, including woodworking and art, and excellent teachers. He was chosen to appear on stage with George "Gabby" Hayes, although his moment was short-lived when Hayes hit Reid's throat, causing Reid to choke and miss the remainder of the show.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_003, TRT: 3:29:24 ?

Tim Reid lived with his father and stepmother while attending Crestwood High School in Chesapeake, Virginia. Although she was not particularly warm to Reid, his stepmother tried to raise Reid in Norfolk, Virginia. Reid received a good education at Crestwood High School where he participated in track, was the school newspaper's photographer and was inspired by the accomplished African American faculty, which included U.S. military veterans. As a teenager, Reid traveled between Norfolk and Baltimore, Maryland to visit his mother before she became a live-in domestic for a white family in Hempstead, New York. Once at a bus stop in Virginia, Reid was told to leave a restaurant when he entered by mistake the entrance for whites; a black waitress looked out for him and brought him food. He reflects upon the State of Virginia's African American history and his opinion of the doctrine "separate but equal," in light of the integration case of the Norfolk Seventeen.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_004, TRT: 4:29:13 ?

Tim Reid served as bodyguard for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during King's 1960 visit to New Calvary Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia. Reid's father was politically connected in Chesapeake, Virginia. In 1963, Reid's father opened the Combo Terrace nightclub, which closed when a rival black business owner conspired with the sheriff, framing him. That summer, Reid waited tables in Virginia Beach before entering Norfolk State College. His first month, he traveled with a friend to the March on Washington. He then joined the college's NAACP chapter, which organized a solidarity march in Norfolk with the Freedom March in Alabama. In college, he majored in business administration

and economics while acting in college productions. His political mentors included William Robinson, Sr. and Joseph Jordan, Jr. In 1968, after graduating, he went to work for E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company. He relocated to Chicago, Illinois as the city rioted in response to King's assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_005, TRT: 5:29:15 ?

Tim Reid worked for E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company while living in Markham, Illinois with his first wife and son. He showed off his first home to his paternal grandmother when she visited him shortly before her death. Reid met Tom Dreesen when he volunteered for an anti-drug school program. Dreesen, who grew up in poverty in Harvey, Illinois, became Reid's first white friend as well as his comedic partner. Reid and Dreesen performed as Tim and Tom, the first interracial comedy duo. Reluctant to leave his job's financial success, Reid eventually left DuPont to pursue show business. During tough times as a struggling performer, Reid relied on his investment in gold stock. Tim and Tom toured from 1969 to 1975 and, in Chicago, met HistoryMaker Della Reese who encouraged Reid to pursue a solo career. While Tim and Tom disbanded, they wrote a book with Ron Rapoport about their act: 'Tim & Tom: An American Comedy in Black and White.'

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_006, TRT: 6:30:03 ?

Tim Reid, through his friendship with HistoryMaker Della Reese, learned how to survive in show business and the unique challenges that black female performers of her era faced. In 1975, after struggling to launch his standup career in California, Reid moved to Washington, D.C. for an eight-week stint at a nightclub where he performed political comedy. Reid became acquainted with the city's underground nightlife before returning to Hollywood. After performing with the War Babies, a sketch comedy group, he was chosen for the cast of 'The Richard Pryor Show,' a short-lived improvisational television series starring Richard Pryor and featuring Robin Williams and Paul Mooney. Reid also describes his reasons for leaving his first marriage and parallels between his and Pryor's upbringings. Reid was fired from a TV show after he argued with the show's director who made racist remarks about his performance. He was then cast as Gordon "Venus Flytrap" Sims on 'WKRP in Cincinnati.'

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_001_007, TRT: 7:31:27 ?

Tim Reid played Gordon "Venus Flytrap" Sims, a disc jockey, on the television series 'WKRP in Cincinnati.' During his audition, Reid argued that the character was one-dimensional, and Hugh Wilson, the show's creator, agreed and convinced his associates to pick Reid for the part. During the show's first season in 1977, every character had a backstory episode, except for Reid's. Eventually, Wilson scripted an episode, "Who Is Gordon Sims?", that depicted Venus Flytrap's backstory as a Vietnam War veteran. Reid received an acting award from the U.S. Marine Corps for his performance. After the cancellation of 'WKRP in Cincinnati' in 1981, Reid traveled to Spain to shoot television footage for Bob Guccione's Penthouse magazine. When he returned to the U.S., he proposed to HistoryMaker Daphne Maxwell Reid, and they married in 1982. Reid reflects upon his rebel identity, black Hollywood, his transition from comedy to acting and the importance of respect in fostering successful relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_008, TRT: 8:29:50 ?

Tim Reid's character, Gordon "Venus Flytrap" Sims, on 'WKRP in Cincinnati' became more complex following the episode, "Who Is Gordon Sims?" In 1982, when producer Hugh Wilson clashed with executives, CBS cancelled 'WKRP' in spite of the show's success. As a result, Reid began producing his own content.

Bob Guccione hired Reid to produce a television show for Penthouse. Yet, due to Guccione's legal issues, Reid's footage never aired. Reid played the brother of HistoryMaker Robert Guillaume's character on 'Benson,' and appeared in the series 'Teachers Only,' followed by 'Simon & Simon.' Restless for a lead role, Reid presented to CBS executives the idea for a spinoff series about his character, Lt. Marcel "Downtown" Brown. When they rejected his idea, he left the show and approached Hugh Wilson about developing a new series. Their dramedy, 'Frank's Place,' took place in segregated New Orleans, and featured multigenerational storytelling. Reid also describes his meeting with William S. Paley in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_009, TRT: 9:29:50 ?

Tim Reid describes audience responses to the TV series 'Frank's Place,' which garnered acclaim for its unique portrayal of African American culture. Reid collaborated with producer Hugh Wilson to create an episode that would criticize unethical business practices. However, when "The King of Wall Street" aired, CBS president Kim LeMasters was insulted and cancelled the series. At New York City's 21 Club, Reid encountered Walter Cronkite, a CBS board member, who relayed the board's reasoning for cancelling the series. His next series, 'Snoops,' was inspired by 'The Thin Man' and his vacation to The Bahamas, where he met a woman who worked for the U.S. Department of State. 'Snoops' starred Reid's wife, HistoryMaker Daphne Maxwell Reid, as a State Department employee and Reid as a criminologist. When 'Snoops' ended, he bought a farm in Charlottesville, Virginia and took a break from show business. He describes showing episodes of 'Frank's Place' in New Orleans, and watching old films with his grandmother.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_010, TRT: 10:30:31 ?

Tim Reid traveled to England and Spain in 1980 to perform in a beer commercial directed by Richard Lester. In 1989, Reid re-entered show business following a two-year hiatus. Under John Frankenheimer's direction, Reid acted in 'Dead Bang' and 'The Fourth War,' both of which were filmed in Canada. Reid played opposite Vanessa Williams in an episode of 'Perry Mason.' He then appeared in the TV movie, 'Stephen King's It,' shot in Vancouver. Reid describes the creation of Tim Curry's clown costume for 'It,' and Starbucks' market expansion in the late 1980s. In 1991, Reid played Dr. Lorenzo Lozano on 'Zorro.' In the early 1990s, Reid reprised his character, Gordon "Venus Flytrap" Sims, for 'The New WKRP in Cincinnati,' and appeared in 'Mastergate' and 'Highlander.' In 1994, he played Ray Campbell on 'Sister, Sister,' which starred Tia and Tamera Mowry, and HistoryMaker Jackee Harry. He describes a moving encounter with a fan and his relationship with the Mowry twins. Reid also reflects upon fatherhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_011, TRT: 11:28:40 ?

Tim Reid's role on 'Sister, Sister' expanded his following to include a new, younger audience. During this time, he also acted in 'Race for Freedom: The Underground Railroad,' produced by own his company, United Image Entertainment. Reid talks about their decision to exclude racial slurs from the script. His company then partnered with Alliance Atlantis Communications Inc. to produce 'The Runaways' about Henry Box Brown, and William and Ellen Craft. In 1997, construction began on Reid's production studio, New Millennium Studios, in Petersburg, Virginia. With assistance from Robert L. Johnson, he partnered with Blockbuster to produce and direct the film, 'Once Upon a Time...When We Were Colored,' based on Clifton Taulbert's book of the same title. The film starred Phylicia Rashad, Al Freeman, Jr., and blues musician Taj

Mahal. Reid recalls an incident during filming when his costume designer's aorta burst. He also reflects upon film representations of African American culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_012, TRT: 12:28:29 ?

Tim Reid co-created and directed the Showtime series, 'Linc's,' which starred Steven Williams and his wife, HistoryMaker Daphne Maxwell Reid. It also featured cameos by well-known figures like Johnnie Cochran. Produced by New Millennium Studios and shot in Petersburg, Virginia, 'Linc's' was the first sitcom since 'The Jackie Gleason Show' to be filmed outside New York City or Los Angeles. In 2000, Reid starred in the Disney Channel movie 'Alley Cats Strike.' Reid describes the challenges he faced in running New Millennium Studios. To make use of the studio's facility, Reid founded Legacy Media Institute to help beginning filmmakers learn film production. Reid shares his plans for New Millennium Studios and describes the subjects for documentary films he hopes to make, including Elizabeth Keckley and Maggie L. Walker. Reid's film about the history of Virginia, 'Keepers of the Flame,' was shown at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. He also reflects upon the importance of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_013, TRT: 13:28:17 ?

Tim Reid's studio, New Millennium Studios, opened in Petersburg, Virginia in 1998. Since then, Reid honed his interest in documentary filmmaking. With his partner, HistoryMaker DeWayne Wickham, Reid documented subjects related to black culture, including the Red Ball Express, the builders of the Alaska Highway, Blind Tom, Oscar Micheaux and Pocahontas Island. To research Cuba's first multi-racial political party, Reid and Wickham traveled to Cuba where Fidel Castro granted them library access. New Millennium Studios also produced the film 'For Real' and the pilot for 'Blues in the Night.' The studio was the first African American vendor to establish a relationship with Blockbuster. However, when the distribution model changed, shifting from VHS and DVDs to online channels and video-on-demand, Blockbuster and New Millennium Studios suffered. Reid describes Maggie L. Walker's history and his concerns for the African American community. He also reflects upon his life and values.

Video Oral History Interview with Tim Reid, Section A2012_067_002_014, TRT: 14:13:10 ?

Tim Reid reflects upon his legacy, which includes his three children, in addition to his film and television contributions. Reid describes his relationship with HistoryMaker Daphne Maxwell Reid. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.