

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Audrey Edwards

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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>	Edwards, Audrey, 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 12, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:51:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Magazine editor and author Audrey Edwards (1947 - ) was the executive editor and editor of <i>Essence</i> magazine, and also served as executive editor and vice president of editorial operations at <i>Black Enterprise</i> magazine. Edwards was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 12, 2013, in Brooklyn, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_320
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine editor and author Audrey M. Edwards was born on April 21, 1947 in Tacoma, Washington. Edwards received her B.A. degree from the University of Washington in 1969, and her M.A. degree from Columbia University in 1974.

In 1970, Edwards began her career at *Redbook* magazine as an associate editor in the fiction department. She served for one year as editor of Community New Service, a black and Puerto Rican news service in 1974. Then, in 1975, Edwards went to Fairchild Publications where she was hired as a news reporter for the trade paper, *Supermarket News*, and was then promoted to the promotions news editor position. In 1977, Edwards joined *Black Enterprise* magazine as an associate editor, but left in 1978 to become a senior editor at *Family Circle* magazine. Edwards was named executive editor of *Essence* magazine in 1981, and was promoted to the position of editor two years later. She left *Essence* in 1986 to open a real estate brokerage firm, Plaza Properties, but continued to write for the magazine as a contributing editor/writer. In 1990, she returned to *Black Enterprise* magazine as executive editor and vice president of editorial operations, while continuing to run her real estate business. In 1998, Edwards became a senior editor at *More* magazine.

In 2008, after successfully running her real estate company for twenty-two years, Edwards joined the real estate firm of Brown Harris Stevens as an associate broker. In addition, Edwards has served as an adjunct professor of magazine writing and magazine editing at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and New York University, respectively. Edwards has consistently freelanced as a journalist, and her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Vibe*, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Essence*, *More*, *Redbook*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Glamour* and *Black Enterprise*. Edwards has also authored several books including, *Children of the Dream: The Psychology of Black Success*, published by Doubleday in 1992, and co-written with Dr. Craig Polite. Her latest work is a collaboration with Edward Lewis, co-founder, CEO and publisher of *Essence* magazine, on his business memoir, *The Man From Essence: Creating a Magazine for Black*

*Women*, to be published by Atria Books (Simon & Schuster) in 2014.

Edwards' professional affiliations include membership in the New York Association of Black Journalists (NYABJ), The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY). She served as a regional director of NABJ from 1981 to 1983, and was the program co-chair for the NABJ Annual Convention held in New York in 1989. In 1992, Edwards received an NYABJ Excellence Award for Magazine Feature Writing.

Audrey Edwards was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 12, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Audrey Edwards was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 12, 2013, in Brooklyn, New York, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine editor and author Audrey Edwards (1947 - ) was the executive editor and editor of Essence magazine, and also served as executive editor and vice president of editorial operations at Black Enterprise magazine.

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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:

Edwards, Audrey, 1947-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Edwards, Audrey, 1947---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Magazine Editor

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Author

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## 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 Audrey Edwards, December 12, 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).

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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 Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:27 ?

Audrey Edwards was born on April 21, 1947 in Tacoma, Washington to Bertie Edwards and Cyril Edwards. Her father was born in 1907 on the Caribbean island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies, and witnessed the unrest there when it became part of the U.S. Virgin Islands. At sixteen years old, he migrated to New York City. Her mother was born in Danville, Virginia, and completed one year at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. She then traveled to New York City the following summer, hoping to earn enough money for another years' tuition. Instead, she enlisted in the Women's Army Corps, and rose to the rank of captain after completing Officer Candidate School. She met Edwards' father, a master sergeant, while serving in Birmingham, England during World War II. They married in 1946 and moved to Fort Lewis, Washington, where Edwards' father was stationed. When Edwards was six years old, her family spent two years in Japan, followed by short stints in Virginia, New Jersey and Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:03 ?

Audrey Edwards completed the first grade in Japan, where her family led an upper class lifestyle, and were treated respectfully by the inquisitive Japanese people, many of whom had never encountered African Americans before. Next, Edwards lived with her maternal grandmother in Danville, Virginia, where she attended an underfunded and segregated school. When the family moved to Jefferson City, Missouri the following year, Edwards enrolled at an integrated Catholic school. Her family returned to Tacoma, Washington, where Edwards attended John R. Rogers Elementary School for the sixth grade. Although the school was integrated, Edwards had few African American classmates prior to graduating to Gault Junior High School. At Lincoln High School, she became an editor of the school newspaper, and was hired to write a column for young people in Tacoma News Tribune. She became interested in the Civil Rights Movement, and hoped to attend the March on Washington, but was thwarted by her parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:27 ?

Audrey Edwards graduated from Lincoln High School in 1965. She hoped to attend a university in Los Angeles, California, but because of financial constraints, opted to attend the University of Washington in Seattle, a large, predominantly white school. Edwards struggled socially at the university; and in 1968, decided to transfer to Howard University in Washington, D.C. for her junior year. There, classes were canceled frequently due to civil rights protests, especially following the death of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The next year, Edwards returned to the University of Washington, and considered joining the city's Black Panther Party chapter. In 1969, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in history, and was awarded a fellowship to attend Boston University. However, unenthused about the program, she withdrew after two weeks, and moved to New York City to live with her cousin, Theresa Edwards, who introduced her to her half-sisters from her father's first marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:39 ?

Audrey Edwards found work as a secretary at Redbook in New York City, and was promoted to assistant editor within six months. There, she met associate editors Sandra Satterwhite and Audreen Ballard. After two years, Edwards was

hired at Columbia University's Urban Center, where she helped to bring in speakers like civil rights leaders Andrew Young and Coretta Scott King. She also earned her masters' degree at the Teachers College of Columbia University during that time. Next, Edwards worked at Community News Service, a black and Puerto Rican press service that wrote local stories for mainstream news outlets. She was then hired as a reporter for Supermarket News, a trade press run by Fairchild Publications, Inc. There, she acquired business writing skills, which aided her transition to Black Enterprise, where she worked as an associate editor with founder Earl G. Graves, Sr. From there, she served as a senior editor at Family Circle for two years before being recruited by Edward Lewis at Essence magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:39 ?

Audrey Edwards was propositioned by Essence founder Edward Lewis to become executive editor at the magazine in 1981. Although Edwards initially declined, she quickly reconsidered, and began working closely with the newly appointed editor-in-chief, Susan Taylor. Together, they focused on publishing stories about celebrities, relationships, community service and politics. During Edwards' first year, she helped Essence to produce its first November men's issue. The magazine also featured articles by author Bebe Moore Campbell, and a series about the black women's experiences with skin color discrimination, headed by author Alice Walker. Edwards helped Taylor to manage the staff, and even wrote the first editor's page, which later became Taylor's In the Spirit column. Following Vanessa Williams' crowning as the first African American Miss America in 1983, Essence decided to feature her on its cover, but the issue was unfortunately published at the same time as Williams' nude photos in Penthouse magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:47 ?

Audrey Edwards became the executive editor at Essence magazine in 1981, where she worked under editor-in-chief Susan Taylor. Edwards strove to document historic events in African American history, such as Vanessa Williams' crowning as Miss America and Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. During her tenure, the magazine also began a collaboration with WPIX-TV that later became a nationally syndicated television show. Taylor hosted the program and Edwards helped select articles to reformat for television. At this point in the interview, Edwards describes the history of Essence magazine, which was founded by four African American men: Clarence Smith, Jonathan Blount, Cecil Hollingsworth and Ed Lewis. After returning to Black Enterprise, Edwards wrote an article honoring the tenth anniversary of Essence magazine. This, as well as her experiences from working at the publication, prompted Lewis to choose Edwards as his co-author for 'The Man from Essence: Creating a Magazine for Black Women.'

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:11 ?

Audrey Edwards served as executive editor of Essence magazine for five years, starting in 1981. During her tenure, the magazine started its own local television program, becoming the first of its kind to do so. Edwards assisted in choosing stories and guests for the series, which launched in 1984 and later became nationally syndicated. An advocate for hiring African American women, Edwards worked alongside editors Mikki Taylor and Harriette Cole. Under Edwards' guidance, Essence expanded its coverage of traditional women's topics to also include politics and world affairs, as well as travel pieces that highlighted majority black destinations. Essence also gained a strong male readership, and became a forum for African American men and women. In 1986,

Edwards decided to leave Essence in order to start her own realty business, but she retained part time employment there as she trained her successor, Stephanie Stokes Oliver. At this point in the interview, Edwards reflects upon her career.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_008, TRT: 8:31:18 ?

Audrey Edwards worked as the editor-at-large at Essence magazine for a year while starting her real estate business, Plaza Properties, in 1986. In 1991, Edwards was hired as an executive editor at Black Enterprise, but left after five months in order to focus on writing 'Children of the Dream: The Psychology of Black Success' with psychologist Craig K. Polite. Together, they conducted nearly eighty interviews with individuals raised during the Civil Rights Movement in order to examine the success of African Americans of that generation. Afterwards, Edwards returned to buying, selling and investing in properties in Brooklyn, New York; Manhattan, New York; upstate New York; and Georgia. She opened her own office in 2002, but after the death of three loved ones, including her mother, Bertie Edwards, she closed the office and moved to Paris, France. She lived there for three months before returning to New York City, where she began working at Brown Harris Stevens real estate.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_009, TRT: 9:30:22 ?

Audrey Edwards wrote for the African American health magazine Heart and Soul in 1998, where she worked with Stephanie Stokes Oliver for a second time. The following year, she wrote and edited for the newly founded More magazine. To supplement the income from her real estate business, Edwards wrote articles for a number of publications, including The New York Times, Vibe, Seventeen, Ladies' Home Journal, and Black Enterprise. She wrote the 'Bring Me Home a Black Girl' article for Essence magazine, which incited pushback from a few editors. Nevertheless, the piece garnered both positive and negative responses from readers, and Edwards was also invited to appear on a radio show with author Randall Kennedy. In 2005, Essence founder Edward Lewis sold the publication to Time Warner Inc. in order to keep the magazine afloat. At this point in the interview, Edwards talks about Susan Taylor's retirement from Essence and the importance of the independent black press such as Black Enterprise.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Edwards, Section A2013\_320\_001\_010, TRT: 10:19:12 ?

Audrey Edwards describes her concerns for the future of the black press and for the African American community in general. She concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy and narrating her photographs.