

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Daryl Cumber Dance

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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>	Dance, Daryl Cumber
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 7, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:22:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Educator Daryl Cumber Dance (1938 - ) served as professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University for twenty years, and at the University of Richmond for nineteen years. She was named the Sterling A. Brown Professor of English at Howard University in 2013. Dance was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 7, 2016, in Richmond, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_100
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator Daryl Cumber Dance was born on January 17, 1938 in Richmond, Virginia to elementary school teacher Veronica Bell Cumber and entrepreneur Allen Cumber. Dance graduated from Ruthville High School in Ruthville, Virginia; and went on to earn her A.B. degree in English in 1957, and her M.A. degree in English in 1963, both from Virginia State College, now Virginia State University. She received her Ph.D. degree in English from the University of Virginia in 1971.

Dance was hired as an English teacher at Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia in 1957. She remained at Armstrong until 1962, when she returned to her alma mater, Virginia State College, as an instructor of English. After obtaining her Ph.D. degree in 1971, Dance returned to Virginia State College for one year as an assistant professor of English. She left in 1972 to join the faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University as an assistant professor of English, becoming an associate professor of English in 1978, and obtaining full professorship in 1985. Between 1983 and 1984, Dance also served as the acting coordinator of the Afro-American Studies program at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 1993, she joined the faculty of the University of Richmond as a professor of English. She was named the Sterling A. Brown Professor of English at Howard University in 2013. Dance served as the Jessie Ball duPont Visiting Scholar at the University of Richmond as well as the visiting professor of Black Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Dance authored nine books, including *Shuckin' and Jivin': Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans* (1978), *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical and Critical Sourcebook* (1986), *Honey, Hush! An Anthology of African American Women's Humor* (1998), *From My People: 400 Years of African American Folklore* (2002), and *In Search of Annie Drew, the Mother and Muse of Jamaica Kincaid* (2016). Dance also served on several boards and committees, including the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, the Editorial Board of *Encyclopedia Virginia*, the University Press of Virginia Board of Directors, the Board of Visitors at Virginia

State University, and the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada; in addition to her memberships in the American Folklore Society, the American Studies Association, the Modern Language Association, the Zora Neale Hurston Society, the Richard Wright Society, and the Virginia Folklore Society.

She received numerous awards for her work, including the VCU Arts and Sciences Lecturer Award, the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education's Distinguished Alumni of the Year Award, the Sister Circle Book Award for Outstanding Anthology, the Zora Neale Hurston Award from the National Association of Black Storytellers Annual Conference, and The Sojourner Truth Award from The African American Studies Program of George Mason University. The Daryl Cumber Dance Lifetime Achievement Award was created in 2012 by the College Language Association in Dance's honor.

Daryl Cumber Dance was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 7, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Daryl Cumber Dance was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 7, 2016, in Richmond, Virginia, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Educator Daryl Cumber Dance (1938 - ) served as professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University for twenty years, and at the University of Richmond for nineteen years. She was named the Sterling A. Brown Professor of English at Howard University in 2013.

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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:

Dance, Daryl Cumber

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Dance, Daryl Cumber--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:

English Professor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Daryl Cumber Dance, December 7, 2016. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:40 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance was born on January 17, 1938 in Richmond, Virginia to Veronica Bell Cumber and Allen Cumber. Her maternal ancestors arrived in Charles City, Virginia during the 1600s. There, Dance's ancestor, Elizabeth Brown, lived as a free black during the 1700s. She was forced to indenture her sons until one of them, Abraham Brown, saved enough money to purchase a large tract of land, where they built the community of Ruthville, Virginia. In 1810, Dance's ancestors established Elam Baptist Church, which was one of the country's first black churches. In the 1880s, Dance's maternal grandmother, Sallie Brown Bell, was sent to study at the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia, where she met her husband, Luther Winston Bell, who was a member of the inaugural class. He later attended Harvard University, and then practiced law and worked for an insurance company. After his death, Dance's mother, aunts and maternal grandmother returned to Charles City.

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:11 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance's mother, Veronica Bell Cumber, grew up in Charles City, Virginia. After graduating from high school, she enrolled at the Virginia State College for Negroes in Petersburg, Virginia. She completed a two-year degree, and then secured a teaching position in Charles City. Dance's paternal grandparents, Sarah Bassett Cumber and Ernest Cumber, lived in Ruthville, Virginia. Her paternal grandfather studied at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, and worked as a teacher. Her paternal grandmother died when her father was young, leaving him to help raise his younger siblings. Dance's father later attended Saint Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, but did not complete his degree. Her parents met in Charles City, where they married and started a family. Her father was an entrepreneur, and opened a beer garden called the Shanty Inn. Dance was the only child in her household, and often spent time with her maternal family members, who passed down stories of their family history.

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:10 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance grew up in Charles City, Virginia, and attended school in Ruthville, Virginia. She developed a love of reading at an early age. She read books, magazines and newspapers, and far exceeded her teachers' expectations. Dance went on to attend Ruthville High School until her sophomore year, when she graduated early. At fifteen years old, she enrolled at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia. She joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and worked part-time as a teacher's assistant. She also studied drama under Felicia D. Anderson, who was known for her plays throughout the black college circuit. Dance graduated in 1957, and secured a teaching position at Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia. During the summers, she took classes towards her master's degree at Columbia University in New York City. At this point in the interview, Dance also talks about the education of black teachers in the South, and the role of African Americans in Virginia during the Civil War.

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:06 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance met Warren Dance, Sr. while teaching at Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia. They married in 1958, and had their first child in the following year. In 1963, Dance entered the master's degree program at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia, where she also taught part-time in the English department. With the guidance of Professor Joseph Jenkins, Dance wrote her thesis on the works of William Faulkner. Although she generally received support from the faculty and administration, she experienced wage discrimination and was paid less than her male counterparts. In 1967, Dance entered the Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia, where she was the first African American and first woman in the English department. For her dissertation, she worked with Jacob Levenson, and compiled a collection of humorous African American folktales. After receiving her Ph.D. degree, she accepted a position at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:41 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance was a professor of English at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where she taught courses on American, African American and Caribbean literature. After joining the faculty, she worked on her first book, 'Shuckin' and Jivin': Folklore from Contemporary Black Americans,' which was a collection of African American folktales and stories. Her work was reviewed by The Washington Post, and was well received by her peers. In 1978, Dance received a Fulbright grant to collect folklore in Jamaica. Based on her research there, she wrote her second book, 'Folklore From Contemporary Jamaicans.' While visiting the University of the West Indies, she conducted the interviews that were compiled in 'New World Adams: Conversations with Caribbean Writers.' The collection was accompanied by a reference book, 'Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook.' At this point, Dance talks about the differences between white, African American and Caribbean folktales.

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:26 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance wrote 'Long Gone: The Mecklenburg Six and the Theme of Escape in Black Folklore' after six men escaped from death row in 1984. Her research focused on the representations of the escapees in the media and popular culture, which often incorporated elements of traditional African American folklore. She also interviewed the six men after their capture to document their story and the motive behind their escape. Her next project, 'Honey, Hush!: An Anthology of African American Women's Humor,' was published by W.W. Norton and Company. The book included material from the Wintergreen Women Writers' Collective and an introduction by poet Nikki Giovanni. Dance served as a professor of English literature at Virginia Commonwealth University for two decades. In 1994, she accepted a visiting professorship at the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia, where she remained until retiring in 2014. Dance also talks about her other publications, including 'In Search of Annie Drew.'

Video Oral History Interview with Daryl Cumber Dance, Section A2016\_100\_001\_007, TRT: 7:25:50 ?

Daryl Cumber Dance served on boards and committees for numerous organizations, including the Fulbright Program, Ford Foundation, Elam Baptist

Church and the College Language Association. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her career. She also talks about her family and her current writing projects, and describes how she would like to be remembered. Dance concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.