

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marcus Samuelsson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Samuelsson, Marcus
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson,
Dates:	July 18, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:52:08).
Abstract:	Chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson (1970 -) was the executive chef and partner of the Scandinavian restaurant Aquavit, and the owner of the Red Rooster Harlem in New York City. Samuelsson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 18, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_166
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson (born Kassahun Tsegie) was born in Ethiopia on November 6, 1970. Samuelsson was orphaned in 1972, when a tuberculosis epidemic took the life of his mother. In 1973, he and his sister were adopted by Ann Marie and Lennart Samuelsson and brought to Gothenburg, Sweden, where his grandmother, Helga, taught him how to cook. Samuelsson went on to study at the Culinary Institute in Gothenburg, apprenticed in Switzerland in 1989, and then in France from 1992 to 1994.

In 1994, Samuelsson moved to the United States for an apprenticeship with Aquavit, a restaurant in New York City. He was quickly promoted to executive chef and then made partner of Aquavit in 1997. In 1995, Samuelsson became the youngest chef ever to receive a three-star restaurant review from *The New York Times*. In 2003, he opened the New York restaurant, Riingo, which served Japanese-influenced American food. He then launched a television show, *Inner Chef*, which aired in 2005, and another in 2008 called *Urban Cuisine*. In 2010, he opened a third restaurant called Red Rooster in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. He founded FoodRepublic.com in 2011, and opened another restaurant, Ginny's Supper Club, in 2012. In the fall of 2012, Samuelsson, together with Clarion Hotels, launched a restaurant concept called Kitchen & Table. In addition, he has served as a visiting professor of international culinary science at the Umeå University School of Restaurant and Culinary Arts in Sweden, and has been an advisor to The Institute of Culinary Education in New York City.

Samuelsson is the author of *Aquavit and the New Scandinavian Cuisine* (2003), *The Soul of a New Cuisine: A Discovery of the Foods and Flavors of Africa* (2006), *New American Table* (2009), and *Yes, Chef: A Memoir* (2012). He also authored the Swedish cookbook, *En smakresa: middagstips från Marcus Samuelsson*, which was named Sweden's Cookbook of the Year in 2002.

Samuelsson has received numerous honors for his work. In 1999, he was awarded the coveted James Beard Rising Star Chef Award for his work at Aquavit. In 2003, he was named "Best Chef: New York City" by the James Beard

Foundation. Samuelsson has also been named a Great Chef of America by the Culinary Institute of America and a Global Leader of Tomorrow by the World Economic Forum. In 2009, he served as the guest chef for the first State Dinner of the Obama administration. He appeared on and won the reality television competition *Top Chef Masters* in 2010, and was a contestant on the fourth season of *The Next Iron Chef* in 2011. In 2013, Samuelsson won the James Beard Foundation award for Writing and Literature related to food.

Marcus Samuelsson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 18, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marcus Samuelsson was conducted by Harriette Cole on July 18, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chef and restaurateur Marcus Samuelsson (1970 -) was the executive chef and partner of the Scandinavian restaurant Aquavit, and the owner of the Red Rooster Harlem in New York City.

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:

Samuelsson, Marcus

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Samuelsson, Marcus--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Chef

Restaurateur

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Marcus Samuelsson, July 18, 2014. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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 Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_001, TRT: 1:28:32 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson was born on November 6, 1970 in Abregodana, Ethiopia. There, his father, Tsegie, was a priest and leader of the Amhara tribe. After his mother, Ahnu, died of tuberculosis, Samuelsson was cared for by his sister, Fantaye, who was later named Linda Samuelsson. The two children were eventually adopted by a Swedish couple, Ann Marie Samuelsson and Lennart Samuelsson. Samuelsson's adoptive father grew up in a fishing village in Sweden, where his family owned a boat and a bed and breakfast. He went on to travel the world as a geologist. Samuelsson's adoptive mother grew up in a poor family in South Sweden during World War II. She and her husband decided to adopt after having difficulty becoming pregnant. In addition to Samuelsson and his sister, they adopted another child, Anna Samuelsson, who had mixed black and white ancestry. Samuelsson was raised in a middle class community in Gothenburg, Sweden, and moved to larger house after his adoptive father was promoted.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_002, TRT: 2:32:15 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson and his older sister, Linda Samuelsson, were adopted by a Swedish couple, Ann Marie Samuelsson and Lennart Samuelsson, in the mid-1970s. They moved from Ethiopia to Gothenburg, Sweden, where they were raised alongside their adoptive sister, Anna Samuelsson. Samuelsson's adoptive maternal grandmother instilled in him an appreciation of food from an early age. He learned to fish, and was taught to appreciate flavors and textures. Samuelsson attended the majority-white public schools in Gothenburg. He learned to speak Swedish, German and English, and spent most of his free time playing soccer. Samuelsson initially wanted to pursue a career as a professional soccer player, but shifted his interests to the culinary arts when he was sixteen years old. He went on to attend Gothenburg's Culinary Institute. At this point in the interview, Samuelsson describes the racial categories in Sweden, where discrimination was targeted against Southern European, Arab and African immigrants.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_003, TRT: 3:28:39 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson was raised by his adoptive parents, Ann Marie Samuelsson and Lennart Samuelsson, in Gothenburg, Sweden. His mother held him to high standards, and his father helped him confront the challenges faced by black men, including the susceptibility to unjust blame. At sixteen years old, Samuelsson applied for a job at McDonald's, and was rejected because of his race. He found work at a restaurant in a small hotel instead, and then became an assistant cook at the Park Avenue Hotel in Gothenburg, where he was responsible for cleaning the restaurant's fish supply. His boss, Tony Beaumont, offered him an opportunity to work in Amsterdam in the Netherlands, but Samuelsson's father dismissed the idea. Instead, Samuelsson participated in the intensive commis de cuisine program at the Victoria Jungfrau Grand Hotel and Spa in Interlaken, Switzerland. Upon successfully completing the eighteen-month apprenticeship, Samuelsson worked in Austria while his Swiss work permit was processed.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_004, TRT: 4:32:46 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson apprenticed at the Victoria Jungfrau Grand Hotel and Spa in Interlaken, Switzerland when he was eighteen years old. He went on to work at

restaurants in Switzerland and Austria, where he fathered a daughter, Zoe Samuelsson. At that time, he decided to pursue his career rather than focusing on his family. In the early 1990s, Samuelsson wrote to American celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and David Letterman, and requested their assistance in finding employment in the United States. He was eventually hired by Hakan Swahn, the owner of the Scandinavian restaurant Aquavit in Midtown Manhattan. After interning there for six months, Samuelsson was hired at Aquavit as a sous-chef. Then, following the chef's sudden death, he was promoted to the role of executive chef. As a result of Samuelsson's innovative menu, which incorporated new pickling and preserving techniques, Aquavit was awarded a three star rating by The New York Times. During this period, Samuelsson lived on the Lower East Side.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_005, TRT: 5:26:14 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson became the executive chef of Aquavit, a Scandinavian restaurant in New York City, when he was twenty-three years old. Soon after, the restaurant was awarded a three star rating by Ruth Reichl of The New York Times, making Samuelsson become the youngest executive chef of a three star restaurant. As Samuelsson rose to prominence in New York City's culinary industry, he suffered the death of his adoptive father, Lennart Samuelsson, in 1996. In 1999, he received the prestigious James Beard Foundation Award. Samuelsson obtained his U.S. citizenship in 2000, one year prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001, which negatively affected Aquavit and New York City's restaurant community. Samuelsson published his first book, 'Aquavit: And the New Scandinavian Cuisine' in 2003, at which time Aquavit moved to a new location in Midtown Manhattan. A few years later, Samuelsson left Aquavit and moved to New York City's Harlem community, where he opened the Red Rooster Harlem in 2010.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus Samuelsson, Section A2014_166_001_006, TRT: 6:23:42 2014/07/18

Marcus Samuelsson and his business partner, Andrew Chapman, opened the Red Rooster Harlem restaurant in New York City in 2010. Heeding the advice of Chapman's father, they chose a location on 125th Street, near notable Harlem cultural institutions like the Apollo Theater. At this point in the interview, Samuelsson talks about the restaurant's clientele and staff, many of whom were natives of Harlem. He describes his culinary vision and the marketing strategy of the Marcus Samuelsson Group, which included the Marc Burger and Kitchen and Table brands. Samuelsson also talks about the history of African American restaurant ownership, and his admiration for Chef Leah "Dookie" Chase of New Orleans, Louisiana. Samuelsson's wife, Maya Haile Samuelsson, was a fashion model. She also directed the Three Goats Organization, a New York City-based philanthropy dedicated to the needs of young women in Ethiopia. Samuelsson concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.