

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Stanley Nelson

PERSON

Nelson, Stanley, 1955-

Alternative Names: Stanley Nelson;

Life Dates: June 8, 1951-

Place of Birth: New York, New York, USA

Work: New York, New York

Occupations: Documentary Filmmaker

Biographical Note

Veteran filmmaker Stanley Earl Nelson, Jr., was born on June 8, 1951, in New York City. He attended New Lincoln School, a Manhattan private school, from kindergarten through high school. He attended Beloit College in Wisconsin, and later transferred to six different colleges including New York University, Morris Brown, and Hunter College. In 1976, he received his B.F.A. degree from the Leonard Davis Film School at the City University of New York.

Upon graduating, Nelson worked as an assistant editor with documentary filmmaker William Greaves. He also worked for several years at United Methodist Communication, a communication branch for the United Methodist Church. By 1989, Nelson wrote, produced, and directed his first documentary feature, *Two Dollars and a Dream: The Story of Madame C.J. Walker*, a story of the nation's first self-made African American female millionaire. This documentary later won the CINE Golden Eagle Award and was cited as the Best Production of the Decade by the Black Filmmaker Foundation.

Nelson began working as a television producer at PBS on the series *Listening to America* with Bill Moyers. Nelson went on to produce and direct the 1999 Emmy nominated documentary entitled *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords*, and the 2000 Black International Cinema Festival award winning documentary *Marcus Garvey: Look for Me in the Whirlwind*. Nelson and his wife, Marcia A. Smith, then formed the nonprofit documentary film production company Firelight Media. Firelight Media received funding from American Experience to produce the critically acclaimed 2003 documentary entitled *The Murder of Emmett Till*. The film won several awards including an Emmy for Best Directing-Nonfiction, the Sundance Film Festival 2003 Special Jury Prize, and the George Foster Peabody Award. In addition, the U.S. Justice

Department has recently reopened the 1955 murder investigation of Emmitt Till, citing the presence of new evidence exposed in Nelson's documentary.

Nelson has taught film production and broadcast journalism at facilities in Rwanda and at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Nelson received fellowships at the American Film Institute, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the 2002 MacArthur Foundation Genius Fellowship. In 2004, Nelson was honored with the Educational Video Center's Excellence in Community Service Award. In 2006, he completed the documentary entitled, *Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple*.

Related Entries

New Lincoln School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Morris Brown College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

New York University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

City College of New York [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.F.A.

Hunter College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Beloit College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

William Greaves Productions [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Assistant Editor

United Methodist Communications [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Consultant

WNET TV [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Television Producer

Firelight Media [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1988 to ?]

Co-Founder and Executive Director

