

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sheila Frazier

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Frazier, Sheila, 1948- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, |
| Dates: | August 24, 2007 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007 |
| Physical Description: | 7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:05:09). |
| Abstract: | Actress and television producer Sheila Frazier (1948 -) is the founding director of Frazier Multimedia Group. Her acting credits include <i>Super Fly</i> , <i>California Suite</i> , <i>227</i> , <i>The District</i> , and <i>The West Wing</i> . Frazier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2007_240 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress and producer Sheila Elaine Frazier was born on November 13, 1948, in the Bronx, New York, to Dorothy Dennis and Eugene Cole Frazier. Frazier lived on the Lower East Side of New York City until the age of ten, when she moved with her mother to Englewood, New Jersey. In Englewood, Frazier's neighbors included stars and future stars like Clyde McPhatter, Van McCoy, The Isley Brothers and Dolly and Jackie McClean. Frazier attended P.S. 97 in New York City and Liberty School in New Jersey. At Englewood's Dwight Morrow High School, her classmates were Margaret Travolta and Hazel Smith. Inspired by Susan Hayward's performance in the film, *I'll Cry Tomorrow*, Frazier longed to be an actress but was hampered by a speech impediment. Graduating in 1966, Frazier moved to New York City where she served in various clerical positions with Allied Stores, *Boutique* magazine and the United Negro College Fund.

Recruited by the noted Negro Ensemble Company photographer Bert Andrews, Frazier became acquainted with the New York arts community. Frazier studied acting at HB (Herbert Berkoff) Studios in New York, under the direction of Bill Hickey and Uta Hagen. Eventually actor Richard Roundtree encouraged Frazier to take acting lessons from Gilbert Moses at the Negro Ensemble Company which led to additional training with Dick Anthony Williams at the New Federal Theatre. Frazier, then working for a real estate company, had done some industrial films and commercials before Roundtree helped her get an audition with Gordon Parks, who was casting for a new film, *Super Fly*. In the film Frazier plays Georgia, the sultry girlfriend of the hustler Priest, who was portrayed by Ron O'Neal. The tremendous box office success of *Super Fly* along with her instant street recognition surprised Frazier; from that point on she was admired as an iconic beauty in the black community. She appeared in *Super Fly T.N.T.*, the sequel to *Super Fly* and other Blaxploitation films of the 1970s including *Three The Hard Way* with Jim Brown and *The Super Cops*. Frazier appeared in the 1978 film, *California Suite*, with Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor and *The Hitter* with Ron O'Neal and Adolph Caesar in 1979. Frazier was cast with Louis Gossett, Jr. in the television series, *The Lazarus Syndrome*, in 1979; other television appearances include *Lou Grant*, *Dallas*, *The Loveboat*, *Cagney and Lacey*, *Gimme A Break* and *227*. Frazier appeared on *The West Wing* in 1999 and *The*

District in 2001; she has also appeared as herself in television biographies of Jim Brown and Ron O'Neal. Frazier's 2008 documentary film on African American intergenerational wisdom transmission is entitled *You Don't Get Old by Being A Fool*.

By 1980, Frazier was hosting a community affairs show on KNXT-TV in Los Angeles. In 1982, she was hired as a story editor by Richard Pryor's Indigo Productions. In 1985, Frazier was coordinating producer for *Essence* magazine's television series and produced Black Entertainment Television's (BET) *Live from L.A. with Tonya Hart*. Frazier worked with the talent on BET's *Screen Scene* from 1992 to 1999 and headed up the Talent Department for BET for thirteen years. As the founding director of Frazier Multimedia Group in 2003, Frazier provides talent grooming and field production.

Frazier lives in Los Angeles and has one son, music producer, Derek McKeith.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sheila Frazier was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actress and television producer Sheila Frazier (1948 -) is the founding director of Frazier Multimedia Group. Her acting credits include *Super Fly*, *California Suite*, *227*, *The District*, and *The West Wing*.

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:

Frazier, Sheila, 1948-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Frazier, Sheila, 1948---Interviews

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews

African American television personalities--Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

African American television producers and directors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actress

Television Producer

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 Sheila Frazier, August 24, 2007. 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 Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Sheila Frazier describes her family background. Her mother, Dorothy Dennis, was born March 30, 1928. Dorothy's parents were from Portsmouth, Virginia, but she was raised in Yonkers, the Bronx, and in Harlem in New York. Frazier's father, Eugene Cole Frazier, was born April 3 1922 in the Bronx. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps under General George S. Patton, and this experience led him to suffer from lifelong post-traumatic stress and alcoholism. Nevertheless, Frazier describes him as a loving and supportive father. Frazier was the second of three children, and her parents divorced when she was very young. During her early years, she lived in the projects of New York City's Lower East Side, where she was surrounded by the sounds of jazz musicians including her uncle, Jackie McLean.

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews.

African American television personalities--Interviews.

African American actresses--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_002, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Sheila Frazier recalls her childhood. Until age ten, she lived in the projects of New York City's Lower East Side, where she attended P.S. 97 and lived around a diverse group of working-class African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Jews. From their Jamaican godmothers, Ms. Eastman and Mrs. Miller, she and her sisters learned a reverence for God. When she was ten, she and her sisters moved with their mother and white stepfather to Englewood, New Jersey. There, she lived near the Drifters' Clyde McPhatter and composer Van McCoy, and she attended Dwight Morrow High School with John Travolta's sister, Margaret Travolta. Through these influences, as well as her aunt Clarice "Dollie" McLean, Founding Executive Director of the Hartford, Connecticut Artists' Collective, she was surrounded by the performing arts. She also remembers being inspired by popular screen actors, including HistoryMaker Harry Belafonte. Despite this, she was discouraged from pursuing acting due to her stutter.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_003, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Sheila Frazier talks about becoming an actress. At Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood, New Jersey, she participated in the marching corps and some sports, but lacked confidence due to her speech impediment. Upon graduating in 1966, she returned to New York City and entered the workforce, becoming an

executive secretary for the Allied Stores Corporation. While working there, she became more aware of racial divisions between the mostly white executive personnel and the African American service staff. This inspired her to seek out the Black Panther Party. While she did not join, she volunteered for them and took a secretarial job for the United Negro College Fund. After a chance encounter with a photographer working at Burt Andrews' Manhattan studio, Frazier became a model, and started working for HistoryMaker Vy Higgensen's Boutique Magazine in 1969. Around this time, she was introduced to New York's Negro Ensemble Company by actor Richard Roundtree, and began to study acting at the HB Studio.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_004, TRT: 0:31:01 ?

Sheila Frazier talks about her acting career. She joined New York City's Negro Ensemble Company in 1970, where she was mentored by Gilbert Moses and Adolph Caesar. In 1971, she moved to Dick Anthony Williams's New Federal Theatre, where her classmates included HistoryMaker Jackée Harry. Five months later, she auditioned for Gordon Parks' movie 'Super Fly' (1972), and while she was initially passed over, she was chosen to play the female lead "Georgia" opposite Ron O'Neal's "Youngblood Priest." Unexpectedly, the film was a hit and she came to be regarded as a sex symbol. The response was not all positive, and the term "blaxploitation" was coined to criticize the portrayal of African Americans in films like 'Super Fly.' Frazier supports the film for the way it presents Priest's moral ambivalence and his relationship with Georgia, but she regrets that 'Super Fly's' reception may have led her and O'Neal to be typecast subsequently in their careers.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_005, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Sheila Frazier describes her Hollywood career in the 1970s and 1980s. After her role in 'Super Fly' (1972), which she believes has given her a lasting positive reputation in the African American community, she starred opposite HistoryMaker Louis Cameron Gossett on 'the Lazarus Syndrome' for one season in 1974. Then, in 1978, she worked with Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor on 'California Suite.' Pryor became a close friend of hers, and in the early 1980s, he and actor-athlete Jim Brown offered her a position as a producer at Pryor's firm, Indigo Productions in Los Angeles, California. During this phase of her career, Frazier worked on films with Brown, Fred Williamson, Jim Kelly, Ron O'Neal, Adolph Caesar, and John Travolta, among others, as well as hosted a public affairs talk show from 1980 to 1982 on KNXT in Los Angeles. After a falling-out between Pryor and Brown, she left Indigo Productions to become a producer for 'Essence' Magazine's television show. She then started her own public relations firm.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_006, TRT: 0:28:54 ?

Sheila Frazier talks about her career in television and film production and directing. From 1990 to 2003, she worked at BET (Black Entertainment Television) in Los Angeles, California, producing the African American entertainment talk show 'Live from L.A. with Tanya Hart,' the sitcom 'Blackberry Inn,' and other programs. During her time at BET, she worked closely with executives including HistoryMaker Jefferi Lee, Curtis Symonds, and Maurita Coley. She considers her experience at BET a positive opportunity to learn and grow as a producer and aspiring director, but she is critical of BET for its lack of programming uplifting and empowering to the African American community. In 2003, she formed the Frazier Multimedia Group, a talent agency and independent production company. Frazier produces documentaries, including 'You Don't Get Old Being a Fool,' which compares the life

philosophies of older and younger generations. She talks about her family and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Sheila Frazier, Section A2007_240_001_007, TRT: 0:07:10 ?

Sheila Frazier reflects upon her life and legacy. If given the chance, she would have liked to attend school to learn the more technical aspects of directing, but she is happy to have been able to transition between so many creative careers. While she has mostly directed commercials, she would like to return to film acting at some point, to play the role of a wise and capable woman. Frazier maintains a strong faith in God and divine providence, and would consider her main legacy to be as a mentor and teacher. She wishes to be remembered as a person who maintained her integrity, standards, and reputation during her work in show business.