

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Molefi Kete Asante

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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>	Asante, Molefi Kete, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 23, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:46:45).
<b>Abstract:</b>	African american studies professor Molefi Kete Asante (1942 - ) developed the theory of Afrocentricity. He also founded the first Ph.D. degree program in African American studies at Temple University. Asante was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 23, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_104
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Professor, founder, and author Molefi Kete Asante was born on August 14, 1942 in Valdosta, Georgia to Arthur Lee and Lillie B. Wilkson-Smith. He is the fourth of sixteen children. At the age of eleven, Asante attended Nashville Christian Institute, a religious boarding school for black students. At the age of eighteen, Asante embarked upon his journey to study African history and culture. He attended Southwestern Christian College where he obtained his A.A. degree in 1962, and later graduated from Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with his B.A. degree, becoming the first member of his family to graduate from college. While at Oklahoma Christian, Asante published his first book, a poetry collection titled *Break of Dawn*, during his senior year in college. He earned his M.A. degree from Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, California in 1965. Three years later, Asante earned his Ph.D. degree in communications from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Following graduation, Asante worked as assistant professor in the department of communications at Purdue University. While working as an assistant professor, he published his second book, *The Rhetoric of Black Revolution* and was founding editor of the Journal of Black Studies. Asante left Purdue University to work as assistant professor at UCLA where he also served as the first permanent director of the Center for Afro American Studies, and created the Center's M.A. degree program. In 1980, Asante authored, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, the first of a quartet of books mandating that Africans be viewed as subjects rather than objects. From 1973 to 1981 Asante was professor and head of the Department of Communication at State University of New York at Buffalo. He went to Zimbabwe in 1981 to assist the government in training journalists and was in charge of the first diplomas in journalism in free Zimbabwe. In 1984, Asante was hired at Temple University as professor and department chair of the African American Studies department. Two years later, he founded the first Ph.D. program in African American Studies in the nation. In 1996 he was enstooled as the Kyidomhene of Tafo in Ghana, and in 2011, he was made a Wanadu of the Court of Amiru Hassimi Maiga of the Songhay Kingdom in Mali. Asante has directed more than one hundred and forty Ph.D. dissertations making him one of the leading producers of African American doctorates.

Throughout his career Asante has published over seventy-five books, five hundred articles and has won over 100 awards, honorary doctorates and distinguished professorships. He is the leading authority on African culture and philosophy. Asante is frequently sought after by television and news media for insight into the growing field of African American studies. In 2010, along with his wife, he founded the Molefi Kete Asante Institute for Afrocentric Studies in Philadelphia as a high-level African American Think-Tank. Asante has continued to explore African tradition and culture through his writings, consultations, interactions with African leaders, and his professorship. Asante resides in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania with his wife, Ana Yenenga. Together they have three adult children , Eka, Mario, and MK, and three grandchildren, Ramses, Ayaana, and Aion.

Molefi Kete Asante was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 20, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Molefi Kete Asante was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 23, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. African american studies professor Molefi Kete Asante (1942 - ) developed the theory of Afrocentricity. He also founded the first Ph.D. degree program in African American studies at Temple University.

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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:

Asante, Molefi Kete, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Asante, Molefi Kete, 1942- --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:

African American Studies 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 Molefi Kete Asante, May 23, 2012. 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 Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:31 ?

Molefi Kete Asante was born on August 14, 1942 in Valdosta, Georgia to Lillie Belle Wilkens Smith and Arthur Smith. His paternal great-great-grandmother, Frances Henderson Chapman, was born in Dooly County, Georgia, and had ten children, including Plenty Smith. His son was Asante's paternal grandfather, Moses Smith, to whom Asante's father was born in Valdosta in 1919. Asante's mother was born to a teenage girl named Cora in Naylor, Georgia in 1917, and was adopted by Mary Day and John Day. She went on to raise sixteen children, while Asante's father worked in a peanut mill and for the Georgia Southern and Florida Railway Company, until a spinal injury left him paraplegic. At this point in the interview, Asante talks about his birth name, Arthur L. Smith; and recalls changing his name in 1973, after being mistaken for an Englishman in Ghana. There, he received the name Kete from the Asante King Opoku Ware II. He later adopted the name Molefi in solidarity with the South African struggle against apartheid.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:34 ?

Molefi Kente Asante was the first of thirteen children born to Arthur Smith and Lillie Belle Wilksen Smith, who also had three daughters from a previous relationship. He was born with a veil over his face, which was considered to be a good omen in the African American community of Valdosta, Georgia. There, Asante was raised in a four-room house, where his father kept a small library. His father encouraged him to study French and German, and he received his first book from his paternal aunt, Georgia Smith Johnson. Asante began his formal education at Magnolia Street Elementary School in Valdosta. His parents were members of the Church of Christ, and enrolled him at the Nashville Christian Institute, a boarding school in Nashville, Tennessee, when he was eleven years old. During the summers, Asante returned to Valdosta to work in the cotton and tobacco fields. Asante also remembers the music of Valdosta's black community, including his father's improvisational blues songs.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:50 ?

Molefi Kete Asante attended the all-black Nashville Christian Institute in Nashville, Tennessee from 1954. The school was led by Marshall Keeble, who was an African American preacher in the Church of Christ. To raise money for the school, Keeble selected students like Asante to accompany him on national tours, where they presented sermons and oratory to white congregations. Asante viewed preaching as an intellectual exercise, and excelled as a student at the Nashville Christian Institute. He was influenced by Frank Norris Tharpe, who taught history and encouraged his students to question authority; and Merl R. Eppse, who was a professor at the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College. During this time, Asante became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. He joined the protests against segregated businesses in downtown Nashville, which were led by students like Diane Nash from Fisk University. As he witnessed the white reprisals against the movement, Asante began to question Christianity.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:04 ?

Molefi Kete Asante attended the Southwestern Christian College in Terrell, Texas, an all-black school that was affiliated with the Church of Christ. Asante was nearly expelled for confronting the white college president over an instance of discrimination, but was saved by the intervention of the black pastors on the board of directors. Asante also met a Nigerian student at the college, whom he often asked about African culture. After receiving an associate's degree, Asante enrolled at the Oklahoma Christian College in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He became the school's first African American graduate, completing a bachelor's degree in communications in 1964. That same year, the Dorrance Publishing Company released Asante's first book, 'The Break of Dawn,' which was a collection of poetry about the civil rights struggle. Asante then enrolled at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, where he earned a master's degree in 1966. He wrote his thesis on the rhetoric of Marshall Keeble.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:14 ?

Molefi Kete Asante earned a Ph.D. degree from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1968. While writing his dissertation, 'Samuel Adams' Agitational Rhetoric of Revolution,' he also drafted the manuscript for 'Rhetoric of Black Revolution.' Asante taught for one year at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, and then returned to the communications department at UCLA. There, Asante befriended black nationalists Bobby Seale and Maulana Karenga, and was selected as the first permanent director of the Afro American Studies Center. He co-founded the Journal of Black Studies with the center's former temporary director, Robert Singleton. In 1973, Asante left UCLA to join the Department of Communications at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he remained until 1984. Asante also taught at Howard University and the Zimbabwe Institute of Mass Communication, and collaborated with authors of the African diaspora like Abdias do Nascimento, Chinweizu, Kofi Lomotey and Ishmael Reed.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:06 ?

Molefi Kete Asante moved to Zimbabwe in 1981, one year after the country gained independence from British rule. At the request of his graduate student, Naomi Nhiwatiwa, Asante trained journalists on behalf of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's government of national unity until 1982. He then served as a distinguished scholar in the Cathy Hughes School of Communications at Howard University; and, in 1984, accepted a faculty position in the Department of African American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, Temple University President Peter Liacouras hired Asante to create the nation's first African American studies Ph.D. program, which offered both cultural aesthetic and social behavioral concentrations. Influenced by the ideas of Franz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre and Antonio Gramsci, Asante published the seminal text 'Afrocentricity' in 1980. He went on to develop the concept in his books 'The Afrocentric Idea,' 'Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge' and 'An Afrocentric Manifesto.'

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_007, TRT: 7:29:56 ?

Molefi Kete Asante created the first black studies Ph.D. program at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Asante served as the chairman of the department from 1988 to 1996, and educated scholars like Michael Tillotson, who wrote 'The Invisible Jim Crow'; and Daryl Zizwe Poe, who wrote 'Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism.' Asante's theory of Afrocentricity

was supported by historians like Martin Bernal, who wrote about the Egyptian influence on Ancient Greece in the book 'Black Athena.' However, the theory was attacked in the early 1990s by liberal historians like Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who wrote 'The Disuniting of America.' Asante resigned his chairmanship of the department in 1996. He went on to publish 'The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism,' and established the Molefi Kete Asante Institute for Afrocentric Studies, a think tank in Philadelphia. Asante shares his concerns for the African American community, as well as his hopes for the next generation of black youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Molefi Kete Asante, Section A2012\_104\_001\_008, TRT: 8:19:30 ?

Molefi Kete Asante married Ana Yenenga Asante, who was born in Puerto Rico and descended from the Akan people of West Africa. Together, they raised two biological children, Eka Asante and M.K. Asante; and one adopted child, Mario Aroote. Their son, M.K. Asante, was a noted filmmaker and the author of 'Buck: A Memoir.' At this point in the interview, Asante reflects upon his legacy, including his role in developing the concept of Afrocentricity and creating the nation's first African American studies Ph.D. program. Asante also describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.