

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with June Cross

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cross, June
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with June Cross,
Dates:	April 8, 2014 and July 30, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012 and 2014
Physical Description:	12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:55:12).
Abstract:	Television producer and journalism professor June Cross (1954 -) won a number of awards for her captivating news reports, including her documentary <i>Secret Daughter</i> , about the trauma of her childhood. Cross was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 8, 2014 and July 30, 2012, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_159
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Television producer and journalism professor June Cross was born on January 5, 1954 in New York to Norma Greve and Jimmy Cross. Norma Greve was an aspiring white actress and Jimmy Cross was a black vaudeville entertainer, known for playing “Stump” as a part of the black song-and-dance team “Stump and Stumpy”. At the age of four, when June could no longer “pass” as “looking white,” she was sent to live with her mother’s black friends, Peggy and Paul Bush, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Cross spent her holidays and summers visiting with her mother in New York and later in California, after she married Larry Storch, well-known actor of a number of 1960’s sitcoms. Given the racial tensions of the time and the Hollywood spotlight of Norma Storch’s world, June Cross would always be introduced as a niece or an adopted child.

June Cross became interested in reporting at a young age, thrilled by the aspect of asking strangers questions. She attended Radcliffe College and received her B.A. degree in 1975. After graduating, she worked at a number of prominent news sources, including the Boston Globe, CBS News, the MacNeil/Lehrer Report, and Frontline, covering various stories. In 1983, she won an Emmy for Outstanding Coverage of a Single Breaking News Story about the U.S. invasion of Grenada. Cross received senior producer credit for *Living on the Edge*, *Mandela*, and *School Colors*, which won the DuPont-Columbia Journalism Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism.

June Cross is best known for her documentary about the trauma of her childhood, *Secret Daughter: A Mixed Race Daughter and the Mother Who Gave Her Away*, released by PBS in 1996. This was the first time it was publicly revealed that June Cross was the daughter of Norma Storch. The documentary won an Emmy as well as a DuPont-Columbia Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism. A few years later, *Secret Daughter* was turned into a memoir. In 2000, June Cross accepted a teaching position with Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism in New York. She continued to produce a number of captivating reports, including *The Old Man and the Storm* about a family living in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. She lives in New York with her husband Waldon Ricks and their two cats.

June Cross was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 30, 2012 and April 8, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with June Cross was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 8, 2014 and July 30, 2012, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television producer and journalism professor June Cross (1954 -) won a number of awards for her captivating news reports, including her documentary *Secret Daughter*, about the trauma of her childhood.

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:

Cross, June

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cross, June--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Columbia University

Frontline (Television program)

Occupations:

Journalism Professor

Television Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 June Cross, April 8, 2014 and July 30, 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).

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 June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_001, TRT: 1:30:42 ?

June Cross was born on January 5, 1954 in New York City to Norma Greve Storch and James "Jimmy" Cross. Cross' maternal great grandfather became a trick rider in the Barnum & Bailey Circus after immigrating to the United States from Denmark. His wife's ancestors arrived on the Mayflower and became Mormons. Cross' mother was born in Pocatello, Idaho and grew up on a Shoshone-Bannock Indian reservation. She was raised by her grandparents, had her first child at the age of eighteen, and pursued an acting career in Hollywood, California. Cross' father was born in Ocean City, New Jersey to Purcell Cross, a shipyard laborer, and Rosalie Wilkins, a domestic who later owned a speakeasy. Jimmy Cross was a dancer whose career began at the age of six when he started tap dancing nightly. He became "Stump" of the dancing duo "Stump and Stumpy", playing the chitlin' circuit and touring Europe in Irving Berlin's "This is the Army." Cross' parents met through Larry Storch, with whom her mother had an ongoing relationship.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_002, TRT: 2:30:35 ?

June Cross' parents, Norma Greve Storch and James "Jimmy" Cross, met in 1950 at the peak of Jimmy Cross' dancing career. Born of a white mother and a black father, Cross was not light enough to pass. When Cross was three years old, her parents' relationship disintegrated after her father began to drink heavily and became abusive. In 1959, Cross moved from New York City to Atlantic City, New Jersey into the home of Peggy and Paul Bush. She traveled back to New York on long weekends to visit her mother. Cross' half-brother, Lary May, was placed in a foster home because the Bushes did not want to raise a white child in the black community. The Bushes informally adopted Cross and Cross lived with them until she graduated from Atlantic City High School in 1971. Cross also formed close relationships to the Bushes' neighbors, the Gregory family, to whom Cross attributes her academic achievement. Cross describes her earliest childhood memory and the sights, sounds, and smells of living in Atlantic City.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_003, TRT: 3:30:11 ?

June Cross was informally adopted by Peggy and Paul Bush in Atlantic City, New Jersey as a young child. Her mother, Norma Greve Storch, who was a white woman, placed Cross in the Bushes' care because Cross could not pass for white. Cross attended Atlantic City Friends School and Atlantic City High School. She talks about her grade school teachers, developing an aversion to arithmetic, and her affinity for reading and writing. Cross describes the 1964 Democratic Party Convention in Atlantic City, her exposure to the Civil Rights Movement, and the development of her racial awareness. She discusses cultural beauty standards, black hair, and a perm mishap that made her hair fall out. Throughout Cross' upbringing, she concealed her racial identity, being warned by her mother of the economic cost of the truth. Her mother's husband, Larry Storch was an actor on the "F Troop" show who underwent surgery to get rid of his epicanthic eye fold. Cross also talks about Peggy Bush's efforts to conceal Cross' pubescence.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_004, TRT: 4:30:56 ?

June Cross attended Atlantic City High School in Atlantic City, New Jersey where she was mentored by her teachers, Mr. Lindblad and Mrs. Carter, who guided her academically and encouraged her to apply to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the summer after her junior year of high school,

Cross traveled to Europe to visit her mother, Norma Greve Storch, and her mother's husband, Larry Storch, an actor in the TV show "F Troop". While in Rome, the Storchs took a photograph with Cross that forced her mother to concoct a fictional explanation for Cross' presence in an otherwise white family. After graduating from high school in 1971, Cross spent her summer working at the Atlantic City Press and a local card store before attending Harvard University. She describes her experience at Harvard and her difficulty adjusting to the campus environment. Cross remembers her multiple rejections from the Harvard Crimson magazine. She also talks about her relationship with her father, James "Jimmy" Cross.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_005, TRT: 5:30:09 ?

June Cross describes her experience of racial discrimination and the academic challenges she faced at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While there, Cross was hired as an intern at the PBS-TV station, WGBH where she worked with "Say Brother" producer, Topper Carew. After graduating from Harvard University in 1975, Cross interned at the Boston Globe before being hired by Marita Rivero at WGBH as a production assistant. Cross' mentors in the black community include Luix Overbea and HistoryMaker Charlayne Hunter-Gault. In 1979, Cross began working at the MacNeil/Lehrer Report, covering minority and urban affairs in the black and Latino communities. Her father, James "Jimmy" Cross, and her informal adoptive mother, Peggy Bush, both died during Cross' tenure at the MacNeil/Lehrer Report. Before Bush's death, Cross began covering national security in the Middle East and set her sights on becoming a producer. She won an Emmy Award in 1983 for her coverage of the U.S. Invasion of Grenada.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_006, TRT: 6:31:51 ?

June Cross talks about her Emmy Award-winning coverage of the 1983 U.S. Invasion of Grenada. Throughout her career, Cross struggled to embrace her successes. Cross sought counseling after she was sexually violated as an undergraduate at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. From 1979 to 1986, Cross worked as a reporter at the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. She describes a failed attempt to unionize reporters at the NewsHour, the 1984 presidential campaign, her journalistic philosophy, and her decision to leave the NewsHour for the CBS-TV program, West 57th, where she learned the art of interviewing from Jane Wallace and worked with correspondent Connie Chung. Cross then spent a brief period at CBS Evening News before joining Frontline in 1991. At Frontline, Cross had the opportunity to work with editor David Fanning. There she and produced "The Kid Kills", a documentary on gang violence in Boston, Massachusetts, and "The Two Mandelas", the story of Nelson Mandela and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_007, TRT: 7:30:17 ?

June Cross produced several documentaries while working at Frontline from 1991 to 1999 including "A Kid Kills", "The Ashes of the Cold War", "School Colors", "The Confessions of Rosa Lee", and "Secret Daughter". Cross' most well-known documentary "Secret Daughter", was born out of her desire to document white perspectives on race. After Cross shared her family story with Frontline's executive producer, David Fanning, he encouraged her to create a documentary based on her own life story. Cross describes convincing her mother, Norma Greve Storch, with the help of her Buddhist practices, to interview for the "Secret Daughter", learning about her mother's past as a prostitute. After "Secret Daughter" aired, Cross was reunited with Storch's other daughter, Candace June Herman. Cross reflects upon the ways that "Secret

Daughter” impacted her life and her realization of her own complicity in her family’s secret.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_001_008, TRT: 8:22:22 ?

June Cross met some of her paternal relatives while working on “Secret Daughter”, a Frontline documentary of her life story. After leaving Frontline in 1999, Cross joined Blackside, Inc. as a senior producer on Henry Hampton’s documentary on religious faith in the African American community, “This Far by Faith”. Cross talks about Hampton’s death and Blackside’s financial difficulties. In 2000, Cross accepted a fellowship from HistoryMaker Henry Louis “Skip” Gates, Jr. at the W.E.B. Du Bois Research Institute and began teaching at Columbia University in New York City, New York as an adjunct professor. After her mother’s death in 2003, Cross felt free to complete her memoir, “Secret Daughter” which was published in 2006, the same year she received tenure at Columbia University. Cross concludes the session by reflecting upon how her work on the “Secret Daughter” documentary and book provided her with a way to frame her life.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_002_009, TRT: 9:28:43 ?

June Cross' great grandfather, Peter Steffenson, was a Mormon who immigrated to New York from Denmark in the 1890s. Initially a trick rider in the Barnum & Bailey Circus, he later worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. Cross' great grandmother, Clara Burrell, was a Mormon whose ancestors lived in Ohio. Cross' grandmother, June Rose Steffenson married Roy Greve at the age of nineteen. Cross' paternal grandfather was a shipyard worker who married Rosalie Wilkins. Cross is close her extended Gregory family, one of two families that informally adopted her when she was a child. Cross describes raising support to fund "This Far by Faith", which documented religious faith in the black community. She also recalls completing her memoir "Secret Daughter" after her mother's death. Cross talks about current projects including a film on HIV in the rural South, describing the religious community's response to HIV. Cross discusses the field of documentary production and a potential documentary on Detroit, Michigan.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_002_010, TRT: 10:30:46 ?

June Cross describes why she wanted to create a documentary on HIV in South Carolina. She talks about her research process and about South Carolina’s torpid response to HIV. Cross also talks about factors contributing to the high production costs of documentaries as well as the integral components of a production crew. Her Frontline film covering 1991 Haitian coup d’état of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, “Showdown in Haiti”, was released in 1993. In 1995, Cross completed production on her favorite documentary, “Confessions of Rosa Lee”. Cross’ initial interest in this subject was piqued by HistoryMaker Leon Dash’s series on Cunningham in the Washington Post. The film examined the nation’s underclass through the eyes of Rosa Lee Cunningham, a drug-addicted, HIV-positive grandmother who prostituted her own daughter, and was incarcerated at various points. Cross describes how the interviewing Cunningham’s daughter helped in her production of “Secret Daughter”, the documentary based on her own life.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_002_011, TRT: 11:29:01 ?

June Cross describes a lesson she learned from Rosa Lee Cunningham while producing the Frontline documentary “Confessions of Rosa Lee”. Cross talks about journalistic credibility, her own journalistic philosophy, and recent documentaries like “The Act of Killing” and “The Imposter” which straddle the line between fiction and nonfiction. She is interested in producing

documentaries on economic hardship in Detroit, Michigan, the Romare Bearden exhibit at Columbia University in New York City, New York, and the Black Power Movement. Cross talks about the difficulty of securing funding for documentaries on controversial subjects. After Cross' Frontline documentary "Secret Daughter" was released, she rejected an offer from HBO to turn her story into a movie of the week, a decision she regrets. Cross describes parallels between her own struggle for identity and President Barack Obama's as described in his book, "Dreams of My Father". Cross describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with June Cross, Section A2012_159_002_012, TRT: 12:29:39 ?

June Cross describes why Peggy Bush, the woman who raised her, played a minimal role in "Secret Daughter", a documentary on Cross' life. Cross also talks about the lack of diversity in the media as well as the challenge of archiving modern forms of media. She discusses legal and ethical issues she has confronted with her documentary subjects. Cross has an interest in producing a documentary on Pakistan to document the impact of illiteracy on the nation's trajectory. She talks about her family, her community involvement, the strain of being one of the few black professors at Columbia University and the generational differences she has witnessed in black students over the past few decades. Cross reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.