

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Pamela Newkirk

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Newkirk, Pamela
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk,
Dates:	August 3, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:35:52).
Abstract:	Journalism professor and author Pamela Newkirk (1957 -) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for her work at New York Newsday and works as a journalism professor at New York University. She has written two major books, <i>Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media</i> and <i>Letters from Black America: Intimate Portraits of the African American Experience</i> . Newkirk was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 3, 2012, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_164
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist, professor and author Pamela Newkirk was born in New York City to Louis and Gloria Newkirk. Growing up, her father collected African American memorabilia which inspired her enduring interest in black history and culture. Newkirk attended New York University where she received her B.A. degree in journalism. She later earned her master's degree in journalism and her Ph.D. degree in comparative and international education from Columbia University.

In 1984, after writing for numerous African American newspapers, Newkirk began her first position as a daily reporter for the *Knickerbocker News* in Albany, New York. There, she worked her way up from a suburban beat reporter to the New York State Legislature. In 1987, she was hired as a Capitol Hill correspondent for Gannett News Service in Washington, D.C. Among her assignments was covering the 1988 Democratic National Convention. In 1990, Newkirk was one of the reporters who traveled to South Africa with Reverend Jesse Jackson where she witnessed Nelson Mandela's release from prison. Her articles from South Africa for *The New York Post* earned her the International Reporting Award from the New York Association of Black Journalists. In 1992, her New York Newsday reporting team was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Spot News. A year later, Newkirk joined the journalism faculty at New York University where she later became director of undergraduate studies.

In 2000, Newkirk published her first book, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*, which won the National Press Club Award for Media Criticism. The book was adopted in journalism schools across the country and Newkirk lectured widely on racial portrayals and media diversity. Her articles on race and African American culture have been published in numerous publications including *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *Artnews*, *The Media Studies Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.

In 2004, her second book, *A Love No Less: Two Centuries of African American Love Letters*, was published by Doubleday. Newkirk's 2009 book, *Letters from Black America*, a collection of more than two hundred letters written by African Americans over the course of three centuries, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Her fourth book, *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga*, was published by Harper Collins in 2015.

Newkirk is married to Michael Nairne and they have two daughters, Marjani and Mykel.

Pamela Newkirk was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 3, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Pamela Newkirk was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 3, 2012, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalism professor and author Pamela Newkirk (1957 -) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for her work at New York Newsday and works as a journalism professor at New York University. She has written two major books, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media* and *Letters from Black America: Intimate Portraits of the African American Experience*.

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:

Newkirk, Pamela

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Newkirk, Pamela--Interviews

African American journalists--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American authors--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American college teachers--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Journalism Professor

Author

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 Pamela Newkirk, August 3, 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 Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_001, TRT: 1:29:56 ?

Pamela Newkirk talks about her family background. Her mother, Gloria Louise Spencer, was born on December 31, 1935 to Dorothy Spencer, a housekeeper, and Samuel Spencer, a train porter, in Harlem, New York. Newkirk talks about her mother's memories of growing up in Harlem, as well as her aspirations to go to college. Gloria Spencer worked after high school as a computer keypuncher and with the United States Postal Service. She married Louis Newkirk when she was eighteen years old. Born in June of 1931 in the Bronx, New York, Louis Newkirk was one of fourteen. His father was born to a former slave in South Carolina, while his mother, a church minister, was born in upstate New York. Newkirk describes her father's siblings and her father's business ventures. Her father owned an antique store and eventually a block of stores on Bruckner Boulevard in the Bronx, New York. Newkirk also shares the story of how her parents met, and how they divorced when she was young.

African American mothers--Harlem (New York, N.Y.).

African American fathers--New York (State)--New York.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Marriage.

Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_002, TRT: 2:29:55 ?

Pamela Newkirk talks about her parents' marriage and separation. Newkirk describes her earliest memories, which include growing up in the Astoria Projects in Queens, New York City, and attending the 1964 World's Fair with her father, Louis Newkirk. She talks about her parents' personalities, and how her father's optimistic and entrepreneurial spirit played a role in fueling the success of Newkirk's childhood singing group, the Baby Dolls. She recalls the group's performances at the Apollo Theater, winning Amateur Hour, and watching musicians like James Brown, Stevie Wonder, and the Jackson Five perform. Newkirk talks about the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President John F. Kennedy, and how it affected those around her. She comments on being exposed to African American literature at an early age, and credits Phyllis Wheatley and Melba Tolliver with shaping her interest in journalism and writing. Newkirk concludes the tape by describing her father's collection of black memorabilia.

Marriage.

Divorce.

Childhood and youth--Queens (New York, N.Y.).

New York World's Fair (1964-1965 : New York, N.Y.).

African American parents--New York (State)--New York.

Musical groups.

Tolliver, Melba, 1939-

Wheatley, Phillis, 1753-1784.

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_003, TRT: 3:29:08 ?

Pamela Newkirk talks about her experiences in school. Her favorite subjects were English and history, and she was inspired to become a journalist in middle school. She describes the tensions she and her sister faced attending Sheepshead Bay High School in Brooklyn, New York, at the peak of integration. Many African American students were harassed by the Garrison Beach Boys, a violent neighborhood gang. Newkirk attended Sheepshead Bay High School for three years, but transferred to Dwight Morrow High School in Englewood, New Jersey to complete her senior year and live with her father, Louis Newkirk, in 1975. After graduating, she moved to Los Angeles and attended community college for one year. In 1976, Newkirk moved back to New York City to volunteer for Percy Sutton's mayoral campaign. She talks about becoming a journalist, her interest in poetry and politics, and beginning her studies at New York University. Newkirk describes some of her experiences at New York University, where she graduated in 1982.

African Americans--Education--New York (State)--New York.

School integration--New York (State)--New York

Political campaigns--New York (State)--New York.

Sutton, Percy E.

New York University.

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_004, TRT: 4:34:21 ?

Pamela Newkirk talks about newspaper editors and newspapers that helped develop her early career. Newkirk met her husband, Michael Nairne, around 1976 and the two married in 1983. They moved to Albany, New York after she was offered a job as a State Capitol Correspondent with Knickerbocker News, and he was appointed the Deputy Secretary to Governor Mario Cuomo, soon after her marriage. She describes some of the stories she broke during Governor Cuomo's administration. Newkirk moved to Washington, D.C. in 1987 to work for Gannett News Service, where she covered the 1988 Democratic National Convention. Newkirk also talks about covering Reverend Al Sharpton, whom she knew from Brooklyn, and the Tawana Brawley case. In 1989, Newkirk moved back to New York City, New York to accept a position at the New York Post. In 1990, Newkirk had the opportunity to cover Nelson Mandela's release from prison in South Africa for the New York Post. She describes this as the highlight of her journalism career.

Mandela, Nelson, 1918-2013.

Knickerbocker Press.

Cuomo, Mario M., 1932-2015.

New York post.

Democratic National Convention (1988 : Atlanta, Ga.).

Sharpton, Al.

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_005, TRT: 5:31:52 ?

Pamela Newkirk describes the days immediately before Nelson Mandela's release, and the police presence during the release. She talks about what she learned about South African culture during her time in the country, and the effects of U.S. and British sanctions on South Africa's economy. Newkirk talks

about her return to the U.S., where, in 1991, she was recruited by New York Newsday. She talks about some of her major stories at Newsday, such as the election of Mayor David Dinkins and the Crown Heights riots. Newkirk describes covering the 1992 subway crash in New York City, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize. Newkirk also talks about the beginning of her teaching career as an adjunct professor at New York University, which she started while working at New York Newsday.

Mandela, Nelson, 1918-2013.

South Africa--Economic conditions.

Newsday (Suffolk edition).

Dinkins, David N.

Riots--New York (State)--New York.

Pulitzer Prizes.

New York University.

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_006, TRT: 6:30:48 ?

Pamela Newkirk was hired to teach journalism at New York University in 1993. Newkirk talks about her first book, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*, which was published in 2000. *Within the Veil* analyzes how race has shaped media, paying particular attention to the challenges African American journalists have faced. Newkirk highlights her chapter on the 1987 discrimination lawsuit against the New York Daily News, and comments on the difficulties African Americans working in mainstream media face. *Within the Veil* garnered positive media attention and won multiple awards. Newkirk became the director of New York University Ghana in 2006, and became a full professor in 2009 on the heels of her second book, *Letters from Black America*. She describes the highlights of her teaching career at New York University, including her work with the Urban Journalism Workshop. Newkirk concludes the tape by talking about some of the letters she encountered while researching for *Letters from Black America*.

New York University.

Journalism--Race discrimination.

Teaching and learning in higher education.

African Americans in mass media.

New York Daily News (Firm).

Video Oral History Interview with Pamela Newkirk, Section A2012_164_001_007, TRT: 7:29:52 ?

Pamela Newkirk talks about the reception of her second book, *Letters from Black America*. Newkirk describes how her friend and mentor, Derrick Bell, came to write the introduction for her first book, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*. Newkirk is working on her third book, which will use the story of Ota Benga to analyze race and media in New York City at the turn of the 20th century. Newkirk talks about race in turn-of-the-century New York, and other projects she is interested in writing about, like the Weeksville neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Newkirk reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community, as well as her legacy. She concludes the interview by talking about her family, and considering how she would like to be remembered.

Bell, Derrick, 1930-2011.

African Americans--Mentoring.

Mass media and race relations--United States.

African American families.