

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Stanley Crouch

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Crouch, Stanley
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch,
Dates:	March 3, 2002 and May 21, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001 and 2002
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:05:50).
Abstract:	Newspaper columnist, music critic, and magazine columnist Stanley Crouch (1945 - 2020) worked as both a playwright and jazz drummer. Crouch published articles in The New Yorker, The New Republic, and Esquire, and he wrote numerous books of essays, including, "Notes of a Hanging Judge," as well as a novel titled, "Don't the Moon Look Lonesome: A Novel in Blues and Swing." Crouch was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 3, 2002 and May 21, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_020
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

An outspoken writer and critic, Stanley Crouch was born in Los Angeles, California, on December 14, 1945. Encouraged by his mother, Crouch began writing at the age of eight. Crouch became active in the Civil Rights Movement while in junior high school. After graduating from high school, he attended two junior colleges in the Los Angeles area. While studying at the East Los Angeles Junior College, Crouch worked for a poverty program in East Los Angeles, teaching a literacy class. In August 1965, Crouch witnessed the Watts Riot firsthand. This experience radicalized Crouch and he became a black nationalist.

From 1965-1967, Crouch was an actor-playwright in the Studio Watts Company. While at the Studio Watts Company, Crouch discovered the writings of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray who became major influences in Crouch's thinking. This influence caused him to turn away from the black nationalist movement, finding it too reactionary. Crouch taught at the Claremont Colleges in California from 1968-1975 and moved to New York in 1975. For his first five years in New York, Crouch played the drums in an avant-garde jazz band, later becoming a staff writer for the *Village Voice* (1979-88). It was during this time that Crouch started to find his voice as a writer. Then, in the 1980s, he became the spokesperson for popular jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

Crouch has written articles for the New York Daily News and articles for magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *Esquire*. He is the author of three collections of essays, *Notes of a Hanging Judge* (1990), *The All-American Skin Game, or, The Decoy of Race: The Long and Short of It, 1990-1994* (1995), and *Always in Pursuit: Fresh American Perspectives, 1995-1997* (1998) and one novel, *Don't the Moon Look Lonesome: A Novel in Blues and Swing* (2000).

Crouch passed away on September 16, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Stanley Crouch was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 3, 2002 and May 21, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist, music critic, and magazine columnist Stanley Crouch (1945 - 2020) worked as both a playwright and jazz drummer. Crouch published articles in The New Yorker, The New Republic, and Esquire, and he wrote numerous books of essays, including, "Notes of a Hanging Judge," as well as a novel titled, "Don't the Moon Look Lonesome: A Novel in Blues and Swing."

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:

Crouch, Stanley

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Crouch, Stanley--Interviews

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

Music critics--Interviews.

African American novelists--Interviews.

Multiculturalism--California--Los Angeles.

Fathers and sons.

Riots--California--Los Angeles.

Violence--California--Los Angeles.

Los Angeles (Calif.)--Race relations.

Gender identity--California--Los Angeles.

Single-parent families.

Black nationalism--United States--History--20th century.

Baraka, Amiri, 1934-.

Ellison, Ralph.

Black Arts movement.

Bombings--Alabama--Birmingham.

Police brutality--California--Los Angeles.

Moore, Amos.

Africa--Social conditions.

Affirmative action programs.

African American leadership.

Middle class African Americans.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Music Critic

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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 Stanley Crouch, March 3, 2002 and May 21, 2001. 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 Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_001, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch provides richly detailed anecdotes of his family history and childhood in Los Angeles. He describes his integrated elementary school and his exposure to many different ethnicities while he was a child. Crouch also discusses his father's criminal life and impact on his life.

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

Music critics--Interviews.

African American novelists--Interviews.

Multiculturalism--California--Los Angeles.

Fathers and sons.

Riots--California--Los Angeles.

Violence--California--Los Angeles.

Los Angeles (Calif.)--Race relations.

Gender identity--California--Los Angeles.

Single-parent families.

Black nationalism--United States--History--20th century.

Baraka, Imamu Amiri, 1934-.

Ellison, Ralph.

Black Arts movement.

Bombings--Alabama--Birmingham.

Police brutality--California--Los Angeles.

Moore, Amos.

Africa--Social conditions.

Affirmative action programs.

African American leadership.

Middle class African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_002, TRT: 0:30:46 ?
Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch describes his childhood in Los Angeles as a vibrant and slightly violent place. He recalls one of his stepfathers and his grandmother, both of whom were colorful characters known to carry guns. Crouch explains his early interest in writing tells how his mother nourished his interest. He also details his exposure in the Holy Roller church and shares memories of his neighborhood's progressive attitude toward gender roles.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_003, TRT: 0:30:25 ?
Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch continues to describe his childhood and adolescence in Los Angeles. Turning to more philosophical debates, Crouch ponders the nature of gender difference, the development of black female intellect and sensibilities and male-female interaction. He also discusses the racial demographics of his junior and senior high schools and remembers his favorite childhood activities.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_004, TRT: 0:28:40 ?
Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch discusses life as a child in a single parent home, assisted by the firm hand of his grandmother. He recalls the state of affairs in black Los Angeles during the 1960s, and vividly recalls the 1965 Watts riots. Crouch paints a vivid picture of the fractured community and racial tensions in Los Angeles. He also considers the importance of achievement in the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_005, TRT: 0:28:31 ?
Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch discusses his work with adult literacy program an adult literacy program following the 1965 Watts riots. He then assesses the riots and discusses the political and social ramifications, explaining how racial tensions boiled over. Crouch then discusses Black Nationalism, explaining why he disagrees with the movement and continues to critique it.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_001_006, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch continues to critique the black nationalist movement, and criticizes writer Amiri Baraka, with whom he was once friends. He reflects on the degraded role of white women within the black nationalist movement and criticizes those who describe him as a reactionary right-wing writer. He also posits on why Ralph Ellison only wrote one great book and discusses his own role as a commentator in the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_007, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch continues his interview by discussing his poetry, particularly "A Song for Asoka". He then talks about his plays and how they fit in with the Black Arts movement. Crouch cites a long list of events that influenced him as a writer, including the 1963 Birmingham church bombing and various instances of police brutality during civil rights demonstrations. He also discusses the influence of Amos Moore's poetry and summarizes his critiques of black nationalism.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_008, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch gives a detailed assessment of his disenchantment with the black nationalist movement and explains which aspects of the movement disaffected him. He also discusses racial identity within the black community and explains why he rejects the movement to embrace African heritage. Crouch then discusses his teaching career, explaining why he rejected a tenure-track post at the Claremont Colleges in California.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_009, TRT: 0:30:32 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch details his friendship with Ralph Ellison and his sadness in Ellison's inability to produce a greater body of work during his lifetime, explaining how political pressures may have affected Ellison's creativity. Crouch also details his entry into music criticism and outlines his tenure at the Village Voice. He discusses his popularity amongst readers and explains why he was fired from his post.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_010, TRT: 0:29:05 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch discusses his book Notes of a Hanging Judge, a book of essays critiquing American politics and society. Crouch then discusses many issues concerning Africa, including human rights violations, genital mutilation, and AIDS. He explains why he does not use the term "African American" and expresses his hopes that black Americans will cease referring to themselves as African.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_011, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch continues to discuss his time at the Village Voice, explaining how a disagreement with fellow writer Harry Allen about misogyny in rap music led to his dismissal. Crouch then assesses the impact of his novel, Don't the Moon Look Lonesome. Crouch discusses his writing process and some of the major themes of the novel, including jazz and interracial relationships. He also addresses critical responses to the book.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_012, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch talks further about his book, Don't the Moon Look Lonesome, focusing on themes such as black family structure, individual freedom, and black artists. He contemplates the critical reception of the novel, explaining that he was surprised at the indifferent reviews. After sharing his aspirations as a writer, Crouch discusses affirmative action and expresses his concern about the values of working class blacks.

Video Oral History Interview with Stanley Crouch, Section A2001_020_002_013, TRT: 0:13:06 ?

Writer and jazz critic Stanley Crouch reflects on black political leadership and tells what he would change if he were in charge of the country. Finally, Crouch shares his hopes for the future of the black community and talks about how he is perceived in the public, explaining that the everyday person receives him better than intellectuals do.