

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sonia Sanchez

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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>	Sanchez, Sonia, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 19, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Poet and english professor Sonia Sanchez (1934 - ) is an author whose work includes 'Homegirls and Handgrenades,' which won the American Book Award. In 1976, she became chairperson of the English Department at Temple University. Sanchez was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2003, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_084
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Poet Sonia Sanchez was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 9, 1934. Sanchez's mother died a year later, leaving the young girl to be raised by her paternal grandmother, who unlocked her gift for poetry. At age four, Sanchez learned to read, and by the age of six, she began to write. Unfortunately, soon after, Sanchez's grandmother died and the young girl drifted between relatives and family friends. Sanchez went on to spent three decades in Harlem, where she studied creative writing at Hunter College, graduating in 1955.

Sanchez counted the negritude poets among her artistic influences, but also found inspiration from her work as an activist with CORE in New York. While with CORE, Sanchez came into contact with Malcolm X, whose direct truthfulness moved her to write blunt, passionate, and painfully honest poetry about the African American experience.

In 1976, Sanchez settled in Philadelphia, and the following year became, chairperson of the English Department at Temple University. During the course of her career, Sanchez wrote several books and collections of poetry that captured, often with wrenching emotion, the plight of her community. Sanchez found herself profoundly affected by the 1985 bombing of a house full of black political radicals affiliated with MOVE, and eulogized them in *Elegy: For Move and Philadelphia*. Sanchez's 1984 book *Homegirls and Handgrenades: Poems* won the American Book Award the following year. Some of Sanchez's other noteworthy works include: *Under a Soprano Sky* (1987); *Wounded in the House of a Friend* (1997); and *Shake Loose My Skin* (2000).

Sanchez received several awards for her work both as a poet and an activist. Sanchez traveled around the world to read her poetry, and also wrote children's fiction and plays.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sonia Sanchez was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 19, 2003, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet and english professor Sonia Sanchez (1934 - ) is an author whose work includes 'Homegirls and Handgrenades,' which won the American Book Award. In 1976, she became chairperson of the English Department 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:**

Sanchez, Sonia, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Sanchez, Sonia, 1934- --Interviews

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African American women poets--Interviews

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African American women educators--Interviews

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African American women authors--Interviews

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African American intellectuals--Interviews

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African American women civil rights workers--Interviews

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African American families

---

Mothers--Mortality

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Childbirth

---

Orphans

---

X, Malcolm, 1925-1965

---

Civil rights movement

---

New York (N.Y.)

---

Discrimination in employment

---

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

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American literature--African American authors

---

Bogan, Louise, 1897-1970

---

African American press

---

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963

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Garvey, Marcus, 1887-1940

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Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.)

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Black Muslims

---

African American political activists--Interviews

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Life

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Philosophy, American

---

Social justice

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Censorship--United States

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African Americans--Intellectual life

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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:

Poet

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Sonia Sanchez, April 19, 2003. 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 Sonia Sanchez, Section A2003\_084\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Noted poet and author Sonia Sanchez details her family beginnings, the death of her mother during childbirth, growing up in Alabama, and then moving to New York City as a child.

African American women poets--Interviews.

African American women educators--Interviews.

African American women authors--Interviews.

African American intellectuals--Interviews.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American families.

Mothers--Mortality.

Childbirth.

Orphans.

X, Malcolm, 1925-1965.

Civil rights movements.

New York (N.Y.).

Discrimination in employment.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

American literature--African American authors.

Bogan, Louise, 1897-1970.

African American press.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963.

Garvey, Marcus, 1887-1940.

Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.).

Black Muslims.

African American political activists--Interviews.

Life.

Philosophy, American.

Social justice.

Censorship--United States.

African Americans--Intellectual life.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez, Section A2003\_084\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Noted poet and author Sonia Sanchez shares stories of her nascent writing talent and her lifelong struggle to find acceptance within her family. Sanchez also details her involvement with the Civil Rights Movement in New York City in the early 1960s and a memorable encounter with Malcolm X.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez, Section A2003\_084\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:08 ?

Noted poet and author Sonia Sanchez recalls experiences in her twenties in New York at the time of the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of Malcolm X.

Sanchez shares a particularly stinging tale of landing a writing job after answering a newspaper advertisement. Upon her arrival and after seeing she is black, management tells her the job is suddenly and mysteriously filled. Crushed, she heads uptown, and by chance, finds the Schomburg Library where curator Jean Hutson encourages her to start reading black literature. Sanchez is inspired by the writers she discovers. She takes a class at New York University with poet Louise Bogan and begins to pursue her own writing career.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez, Section A2003\_084\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

African American writer Sonia Sanchez talks about her life in the late 1960s-early 1970s, including her published works; the independent black publishing company The Broadside Press; her investigation by the FBI for teaching the writings of banned black authors such as W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey; and black New Yorkers's attraction to the Nation of Islam which she herself joined in the early 1970s.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez, Section A2003\_084\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:26 ?

African American poet and social activist Sonia Sanchez talks about her brief involvement with the Nation of Islam in the early 1970s, including the cultural programs she arranged with noted writers and performers. Looking back on her decades of political activism, Sanchez describes her deep belief in peace and social justice, and explains that her philosophy of life is wholly inclusive: everyone is her sister or brother, regardless of gender, orientation, race or creed.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonia Sanchez, Section  
A2003\_084\_SANCHEZ\_SONIA\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: 1:00:00

This program is the fifth segment of the six-part "I'll Make Me a World" series and is entitled "Not a Rhyme Time." The program was produced by Blackside, Inc. and distributed by PBS: Public Broadcasting Service in 1999. Through the use of archival footage and interviews, the program highlights the Cultural Revolution that developed among African American artists during the latter half of the 20th century that challenged mainstream ideas. There is analysis on Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry and her message of black pride and the importance of self-determination with collections of her works including "In the Mecca." Visual artists such as Romare Bearden, Faith Ringgold, and Benny Andrews analyze how to challenge audiences with African American art and its presentation by many mainstream institutions. The end of the program focuses on the controversy surrounding Alice Walker's book, "The Color Purple," about an African American woman's struggle for independence. There is discussion about the book as well as the 1985 film adaptation directed by Steven Spielberg and how many African Americans condemned them for criticizing African American men.

There is archival footage featuring Sidney Poitier, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Berry Gordy, Jr., Hale Woodruff, Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis. Malcom X, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Those featured in interviews on the program include Faith Ringgold, Mary Schmidt Campbell, Gerald Early, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Haki Madhubuti, Ron Milner, August Wilson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Oscar Brown, Jr., Nora Brooks Blakely, Gene Young, Fannie Lou Hamer, Benny Andrews, Howardena Pindell, Marcia Tucker, Edmund Barry Gaither, June Jordan, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, John Edgar Wideman, Steven Spielberg, Quincy Jones, Eugene Jackson, Vance Amakar, Richard Wesley, and Tony Brown.