

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Stephanie Hughley

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hughley, Stephanie, 1948-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley,
Dates:	February 13, 2006 and February 15, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:23:49).
Abstract:	Arts administrator and producer Stephanie Hughley (1948 -) co-founder of the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the most important African American arts festivals in the world. Hughley is also a dancer and has taught dance at several universities. Hughley managed and supervised the production of over twelve Broadway shows including, <i>Your Arms Are Too Short To Box With God</i> , <i>Ain't Misbehavin'</i> and <i>Bubbling Brown Sugar</i> . Hughley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 13, 2006 and February 15, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_014
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Arts administrator and producer Stephanie Smith Hughley is executive producer and co-founder of the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the most important African American arts festivals in the world and founded in 1987. Hughley served as its Artistic Program Director until 1992. She returned to Atlanta in 1999 to revive the failing and debt stricken organization. Under her leadership, the festivals have expanded from a bi-annual summer arts festival to a yearly ten-day festival held during the month of July and a year round African arts cultural teaching institution, which includes an annual curriculum for teachers and students. Hughley was born in Canton, Ohio to Lillie Mae and Robert Lee Smith, Sr. on October 16, 1948. She attended Kent State University with aspirations of becoming a medical doctor. While at Kent State, she was introduced to dance. Hughley moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 1969 where she completed her studies and entered the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts. Hughley obtained her B.S. degree in biology from Northeastern University and her M.Ed. from Antioch College at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1971, Hughley became a dance instructor and taught at Smith College as well as Northeastern, Brandeis and Harvard Universities. She danced with the Dance Theatre of Boston and the National Center of Afro American Artists. In 1976, Hughley moved to New York City, auditioned for a part in the Broadway production of *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, studied dance at the Alvin Ailey School of Dance and the Little Red School House and apprenticed under the directorship of Ashton Springer in order to expand her theatre management skills. She became General Manager of the Negro Ensemble Company in 1982. Hughley managed and supervised the production of over twelve Broadway shows including, *Your Arms Are Too Short To Box With God*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Bubbling Brown Sugar* and toured the United States and Europe as the Company Manager of *For Colored Girls*. In 1992, Hughley was Theatre and Dance Producer for the Atlanta Committee for the Cultural Olympiad for the 1996 Olympic Games. In 1996, she was commissioned to serve as Vice President of Programs for the newly formed New Jersey Performing Arts Center. Hughley returned

to Atlanta in 1999 to become head of the Black Arts Festival. Hughley serves on the boards of the Metro Atlanta Arts and Culture Coalition (MAACC) and the Atlanta Convention Center and Visitors Bureau. She has been a member of the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers since 1977.

Hughley resides in the Atlanta area with her surviving son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Stephanie Hughley was conducted by Evelyn Pounds on February 13, 2006 and February 15, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Arts administrator and producer Stephanie Hughley (1948 -) co-founder of the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the most important African American arts festivals in the world. Hughley is also a dancer and has taught dance at several universities. Hughley managed and supervised the production of over twelve Broadway shows including, *Your Arms Are Too Short To Box With God*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Bubbling Brown Sugar*.

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:

Hughley, Stephanie, 1948-

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hughley, Stephanie, 1948- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Black Arts Festival, Inc.

Occupations:

Arts Administrator

Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Stephanie Hughley, February 13, 2006 and February 15, 2006. 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 Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30
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Stephanie Hughley was born on October 16, 1948 in Massillon, Ohio to Lillie Bradley Smith and Robert Smith, Sr. Hughley's maternal great-grandfather prepared herbal remedies that he learned from his mother, who was part Native American. Hughley's grandmother attended school up to the sixth grade and met Hughley's grandfather when his brother dated her sister. Hughley's grandparents moved to Canton, Ohio to join her grandfather's brothers who started a farm and obtained jobs at Republic Steel Company. They were among the first black families in the area. Both born in Canton, Hughley's parents met when they attended high school together. Her mother was always optimistic and encouraged education. Her father became a dedicated preacher. He worked his way up to a managerial position at the grocery store, then left to pursue politics. He ran for city council and was in charge of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development programs for the mayor of Canton. Hughley describes spending time on the family farm.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_002, TRT: 0:30:36
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Stephanie Hughley's paternal grandparents moved from Kentucky to Canton, Ohio, where her grandmother kept a garden. When Hughley's parents married, they lived with her maternal grandmother, and Hughley attended kindergarten at Hartford Avenue School. Her childhood was filled with the smells of her maternal grandmother's baking and the sounds of children playing outside. She attended Henry S. Martin Elementary School from the time the family moved in with her paternal grandparents, with whom Hughley never formed a close relationship. Her grandfather was bedridden for her entire life, and her grandmother always seemed angry. When she was nine, Hughley's parents bought their first house, and she enrolled at Washington Elementary School. Her schools were integrated and predominantly white, and she admired her first African American teacher. Hughley was close with her maternal grandmother and often brought friends from high school to her house.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_003, TRT: 0:30:50
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Stephanie Hughley was encouraged by her black teachers. Her schools were integrated, and Hughley disliked traveling to the segregated South, although her father and uncles went once a year. Hughley was inspired by her family, especially an uncle with a talent for music and painting. She dreamed of living in Paris, and learned some French from her sister. Hughley attended Canton McKinley High School, which had a dedicated sports following. Although she was a perfect student, Hughley was rebellious and often stayed out late dancing at the roller rink. Her parents pushed her to be a doctor, and she was inspired by her chemistry teacher, Mr. Christie. From 1966, she attended Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, where she pursued pre-medical studies. The Black Power movement was growing, and Hughley helped bring Angela Davis and H. Rap Brown to campus. Hughley served as president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and was introduced to dance performance when she accompanied a sorority sister to an African dance class.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_004, TRT: 0:30:20

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Stephanie Hughley was active in Black United Students at Kent State University. She wore a natural hairstyle despite her family's criticism. Hughley was living off campus when Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and remembers her peers' reactions. In 1969, she graduated, married, and moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where she raised her two sons and worked in medical technology. Hughley also attended dance classes at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts and earned her master's degree from an Antioch College program run through Harvard University. Elma Lewis brought famous choreographers to teach classes, and Hughley eventually followed Billy Wilson to the Dance Theater of Boston. She danced in an international tour and spent a few months in Aruba. She moved to New York City to audition for 'Bubbling Brown Sugar.' Only understudy roles were available, so instead she secured a job working for the producer, Austin Springer, took dance classes, and taught in the city.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30
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Stephanie Hughley obtained a position backstage with the Negro Ensemble Company through Elma Lewis upon arriving in New York City. She took classes at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater while working for producer Austin Springer. She resolved to become a manager and producer, apprenticing with manager Carolyn A. Jones, who she worked with in Boston. Joseph Papp and Emanuel Azenberg approached Hughley to manage the tour of 'For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When The Rainbow Is Enuf.' Though Hughley was still an apprentice, playwright Ntozake Shange had requested an African American woman manager, and Hughley was the only one available to work. She describes her duties as manager and the positive reception of the show. While on tour, she met her second husband, Thomas Hughley, Jr., and when they married, he joined her on the road. Hughley also managed 'Ain't Misbehavin,' 'A Chorus Line,' and 'Your Arms Too Short To Box With God,' the last of which brought her on tour to Paris, France.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_001_006, TRT: 0:27:40
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Stephanie Hughley returned to the Negro Ensemble Company in 1982 at the request of her assistant, Larry Kevin Walden, at Theatre Management Associates. He had joined the ensemble while Hughley was touring, and encouraged her to consider becoming a manager. In 1982, she became the company's general manager and mounted twelve productions, including Lonne Elder III's 'Ceremonies in Dark Old Men.' In 1986, her husband announced that he wanted to return to his hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, and despite what she perceived as the city's underwhelming art scene, she agreed to relocate. In New York City, Hughley's good friend LaTanya Richardson introduced her to Tom Cullen, the executive director of the Fulton County Arts Festival. Once she was settled in Atlanta, Hughley was offered the position of program manager for the first annual National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta. She remembers what planning the festival taught her about her heritage and the arts, and visiting Ghana and Senegal on her first trip to Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_002_007, TRT: 0:31:00
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Stephanie Hughley advised her friend LaTanya Richardson regarding the theater component of the National Black Arts Festival before she became formally involved. The project was the brainchild of Michael Lomax, the chairman of the

Fulton County Board of Commissioners, and after Hughley moved to Atlanta, Georgia, she signed on as its program manager. She conducted research at town halls and contacted African American artists from a range of artistic disciplines. Hughley organized a Living Legends tribute to honor the legacies of black artists, including Alvin Ailey, Katherine Dunham, and Willie King, Jr. The festival and parade attracted 500,000 participants from across the country. The first Black Arts Festival in 1988 was a huge success, and despite minor setbacks, the following festivals in 1990 and 1992 continued to grow. Hughley served as program manager until 1992, when she was asked to coordinate the Cultural Olympiad of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. Hughley also narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_002_008, TRT: 0:28:00
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Stephanie Hughley worked on the 1990 and 1992 National Black Arts Festivals, which both focused on African American ancestry and the African diaspora. In 1994 she attended the Cultural Olympiad to the Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway, where she was inspired by a nomadic Norwegian poet who performed for homeless American students. Hughley traveled the world seeking artists to represent each country in the 1996 Cultural Olympiad in Atlanta, Georgia. When Andrew Young suggested that the Cultural Olympiad honor Africa specifically, Hughley organized Celebrate Africa!, a festival in conjunction with the National Black Arts Festival. She recruited artists from all over the African diaspora to showcase the depth and variation in African art. Hughley remembers the difficulty of South African drummers playing for West African dancers and remarks on the tendency for Americans to generalize Africa to a single culture. In 1995, Hughley was recruited to consult on the creation of an arts center in Newark, New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_002_009, TRT: 0:28:02
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Stephanie Hughley worked with Baraka Sele and Mikki Shepherd on a celebration of African art called African Exchange! Hughley then designed the theater component of the 1996 Cultural Olympiad in Atlanta, Georgia. She shares her memories of the Olympic Games, including Mohammad Ali's appearance, the bombing, and her favorite cultural performances. She spent five years living in Montclair, New Jersey to consult on the creation of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ-PAC) in Newark, New Jersey. Hughley talks about the state's many ethnic groups, including Cape Verdeans, and how she designed the center to represent them. When it opened in 1997, NJ-PAC was a huge success. Under Hughley's direction, it established a tradition of hosting cultural festivals. She talks about the importance of cultural exposure and the ability of people to connect through cultures. In 2000, Hughley moved back to Atlanta, and returned to coordinating the National Black Arts Festival.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_002_010, TRT: 0:28:10
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Stephanie Hughley helped establish the National Black Arts Festival's Summer Institute, which helps train teachers and provides African American history curriculum. She explains the decision in 2000 to make the festival an annual celebration, and describes the plans to relocate the offices. During the September 11th attacks, Hughley was in Amman, Jordan, looking for Middle Eastern artists to feature. She stayed in Rome, Italy for a few days before she was able to fly back to the United States. In reaction to the attacks, the National Black Arts Festival hosted a cross-faith holiday festival, Diverse Voices, Collective Spirit.

In the following years, the themes of the National Black Arts Festival included Souls of Black Folk in 2003, generations of black artists in 2005, and a centennial commemoration of the Atlanta race riot in 2006. Hughley talks about her plans for the twentieth anniversary of the festival and shares her hopes in regard to taking parts of the festival on tour.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section A2006_014_002_011, TRT: 0:31:11
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Stephanie Hughley's maternal family can be traced back to her white slaveholding ancestors. Her maternal great grandfathers both inherited land from their white fathers, which was passed down through the families. Hughley lists the African American pioneers who have been honored as part of the National Black Arts Festival, including Elma Lewis, Katherine Dunham, Woodie King, Jr. and Douglas Turner Ward. She explains why she agreed to take part in The HistoryMakers' project and talks about the importance of preserving African American history. Hughley advises young people to follow their passions and shares her hopes for the African American community. She describes how she would like to be remembered and includes the National Black Arts Festival as part of her legacy. Hughley concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Stephanie Hughley, Section
A2006_014_Hughley_Stephanie_06_MED_001, TRT: