

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sonya Ross

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ross, Sonya, 1962-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross,
Dates:	December 4, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:01:58).
Abstract:	Journalist Sonya Ross (1962 -) has worked for the Associated Press for over twenty-five years, and became the organization's first-ever race and ethnicity editor in 2010. Ross was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 4, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_309
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Sonya Ross was born in 1962 in Atlanta, Georgia. She attended C.L. Harper High School, and received her B.A. degree in journalism and mass communications from the University of Georgia in 1984. Ross went on to attend Georgia State University from 1985 to 1987.

In 1985, Ross was hired as a library clerk at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. She worked there until 1986, when she accepted a position as an intern for Associated Press in the Greater Atlanta area. Ross was then hired as a general assignment reporter at Associated Press in 1987, and was promoted to a legislative

reporter in 1989. She was promoted again in 1992, and transferred from Georgia to Washington, D.C., where she worked as an urban affairs reporter until 1995. Ross then joined the Associated Press' White House press corps and traveled with Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, as well as Secretary of State Colin Powell to thirty-nine countries. During the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, she was the print pool reporter who accompanied President Bush on Air Force One.

In 2002, Ross was named Washington, D.C.'s world services editor for the Associated Press, where she helped direct coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the worldwide campaign against terrorism. In 2004, Ross was appointed news editor for the Associated Press' regional reporters in Washington, D.C., and, in 2010, she was named the organization's first-ever race and ethnicity editor in order to capture the changing face of race and ethnicity in the United States.

Sonya Ross was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 4, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sonya Ross was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 4, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist Sonya Ross (1962 -) has worked for the Associated Press for over twenty-five years, and became the organization's first-ever race and ethnicity editor in 2010.

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:

Ross, Sonya, 1962-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ross, Sonya, 1962---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Journalist

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 Sonya Ross, December 4, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_001, TRT: 1:32:36 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross talks about her family background. Her mother, beautician Mattie Antoinette Mariano, was born September 7, 1925 in Atlanta, Georgia, to construction worker Antonio Louis Mariano and nurse Mary Bell Jones. The Marianos are of Azorean Portuguese descent, and can trace their family back to three brothers who immigrated to South Carolina in the early nineteenth century. The brothers, two of whom integrated into white slaveholding society, were of ambiguous race, and their descendants became farmers in Georgia after the Civil War. Ross's father, aerospace engineer Harold Ross, was born September 14, 1919 in Atlanta to Minister Osborn Frank Ross, Sr. and Lula Clifford Howard Ross. Howard attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, then served in World War II in Italy. After the war, he worked for Lockheed in Marietta, Georgia, on a test crew for the C-130 Hercules airplane. He met Mattie then, and they married in 1958. Ross was born July 11, 1962 in Atlanta. She describes how she takes after her parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_002, TRT: 2:27:26 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross talks about her childhood in Atlanta, Georgia. Her mother, Mattie Antoinette Mariano, had been married twice before marrying Ross's father, Harold Ross. Mattie's second husband, Harmon Perry, was a photographer, and he provided Ross with professional advice about journalism. Ross shared a ranch house in 1960s Atlanta with siblings from her mothers' previous marriages. As she was growing up, her family would listen to gospel and soul music from local radio stations, but after her father bought her her own radio, she diversified, coming to enjoy genres like pop and rock. When the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Ross was only five, but she remembers her and her parents' responses to the event. She attended G.A. Towns Elementary School and Charles Lincoln Harper High School in Atlanta, where she displayed a high level of reading aptitude. To satisfy her appetite for reading, her father gave her three newspapers a day.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_003, TRT: 3:29:00 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross reflects upon her high school and early college years. She was close with her father, going with him to Atlanta Braves games. Despite losing him to lung cancer in 1976, her years at C.L. Harper High School in Atlanta, Georgia were generally positive, corresponding with a "golden age" for black Atlanta during the administrations of Mayor Maynard Jackson and President Jimmy Carter. Ross was acquainted with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s family and met civil rights leaders like Ralph Abernathy and HistoryMaker Jesse L. Jackson. In high school, she cultivated an interest in both journalism and science, and despite receiving scholarships to Morris Brown College and Spellman College in Atlanta, she was inspired by the story of HistoryMaker Charlayne Hunter-Gault to attend the University of Georgia in Athens, where she at first studied biology. After having difficulties in science and math classes, she was inspired by Thurman Garner's class in Black Rhetoric to switch to a journalism major.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_004, TRT: 4:29:55 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross describes the beginning of her career as a journalist in Atlanta, Georgia. While enrolled at the University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens, she took an internship collating and tagging Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s personal papers for his family at the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, and then got her first writing job for the black Athens Courier. However, she dropped out of UGA due to personal and financial pressure in December 1983, returning to Atlanta. She enrolled in Georgia State University there in 1985 while working at the 'Atlanta Journal-Constitution.' She interned and then worked full-time at the Associated Press as a general assignment reporter. She received her B.A. degree from Georgia State in 1983. In 1989, she was promoted to legislative reporter after covering Maynard Jackson's 1989 mayoral campaign, and under the mentorship of Dick Pettis, she covered the State House during the 1990 gubernatorial race when Zell Miller

defeated HistoryMaker Andrew Young.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_005, TRT: 5:30:29 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross talks about her journey to become the Associated Press's White House correspondent. Beginning 1992 in Atlanta, Georgia, she covered the Bill Clinton campaign at the time of the Gennifer Flowers scandal, and after street reporting from the site of a riot triggered by the Rodney King verdict, she was offered the position of urban affairs correspondent in Washington D.C. Ross was in D.C. during Clinton's entire administration, and she reflects on some of the period's major scandals, including one at the NAACP involving HistoryMakers Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. and Minister Louis Farrakhan. At this time, she benefited from the mentorship of HistoryMaker DeWayne Wickham. Ross interviewed House Speaker Newt Gingrich in the wake of the 1994 "Republican Revolution," and in 1995, AP Washington bureau chief Jon Wolman offered her the position of White House correspondent. As the first African American woman to hold that position, she joined Clinton on the campaign trail in 1996.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_006, TRT: 6:28:27 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross reflects upon her career as Associated Press White House correspondent in Washington, D.C. during the Bill Clinton administration. In Royal Oak, Michigan on Clinton's 1996 campaign trail, Ross met Rosa Parks before continuing on to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. In 1997, Ross traveled with First Lady Hillary Clinton through Africa, touring the Île de Gorée Slave House in Dakar, Senegal and meeting the Maasai people of Tanzania. Ross covered the White House during the 1998 Monica Lewinsky scandal, which, along with a story she broke involving HistoryMaker the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, prompted her to reflect upon the need for journalistic boundaries. In 2000, she covered the disputed presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section

A2013_309_001_007, TRT: 7:27:53 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross talks about serving as White House correspondent for the Associated Press during the first two years of the George W. Bush administration. She comments about the differences in the White House between his and Bill Clinton's presidencies, and their relationships with African American senior personnel, like HistoryMaker General Colin Powell and his successor as U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. Ross was with President Bush in Sarasota, Florida during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. She recounts her personal experience of the event and comments on the changes in diplomacy and national security procedures triggered by the attacks. Ross left her post at the White House in 2002 to become World Services Editor for AP. She also temporarily served as their foreign affairs editor, travelling with then-Secretary of State Powell.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_008, TRT: 8:29:07 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross reflects upon her career up through 2013. In 2004, she returned from her position as Foreign Affairs Editor for the Associated Press to become their regional news editor in Washington, D.C. This gave her the opportunity to focus on mentoring younger journalists. However, after six years, she felt she needed a challenge, and witnessing significant changes in the demographics of the American news media audience, she proposed to AP that they create for her the new position of Race and Ethnicity Editor. In this position, she has led initiatives to investigate racial controversies and to teach and explore black history. Other publications have since followed AP's lead with their own race reporting projects. Ross considers writing a book on African American women in journalism, or attending law school, and concludes the tape by expressing her concerns for African American youth, especially girls.

Video Oral History Interview with Sonya Ross, Section
A2013_309_001_009, TRT: 9:07:05 2013/12/04

Sonya Ross reflects upon her life and legacy. Her professional legacy, she believes, is to have served as an

inspiration and an example for African American girls with career aspirations. She has never married, but does have a significant other. Ross hopes to be remembered for making the world a kinder place.