

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Etta Moten Barnett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Barnett, Etta Moten, 1902-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett,
Dates:	December 16, 1999 and February 4, 1993
Bulk Dates:	1993 and 1999
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:07).
Abstract:	Singer and community leader Etta Moten Barnett (1901 - 2004) performed in Broadway's legendary productions of "Sugar Hill", "Lysistrata" and as Bess in "Porgy and Bess", her signature role. Barnett was the first African American to sing at the White House and also served as an United States representative on cultural missions to ten African nations. Barnett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 16, 1999 and February 4, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A1999_005
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and community leader Etta Moten Barnett was born on November 5th, 1901, in Weimar, Texas, the only daughter of Reverend Freeman F. Moten and Ida Norman Moten. Before attending the University of Kansas Etta Moten married Lieutenant Curtis Brooks and they had three children. Unhappy in her marriage Moten chose to attend college and divorce her husband, while caring for her children on the weekends.

After her graduation from the University of Kansas, Etta Moten set out for New York City and more specifically, Broadway. She went on to achieve stardom in the theater, performing in legendary Broadway productions of Sugar Hill, Lysistrata and Porgy and Bess, joining the ranks of African America's most elite talent. Etta Moten also appeared in many films including Flying Down to Rio, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

In 1934 Etta Moten married Claude Barnett, founder of the Negro Associated Press. Their marriage also represented a change in the scope of Barnett's influence. Barnett and her husband began to focus on more philanthropic efforts. Together they enjoyed a special bond, traveling during the late 1950s as members of a U.S. delegation to Ghana. She also represented the United States at the independence ceremonies of Nigeria, Zambia and Lusaka. After her husband's death in 1967, Etta Moten Barnett became more active in domestic affairs, including working with the Chicago's DuSable Museum and Lyric Opera. Her many distinctions included honorary degrees from Spelman College, Lincoln University and the University of Illinois; an award for her Contributions to American Music by Atlanta University; and the establishment of a scholarship in her name for minority students at the Chicago Academy for the Performing Arts.

Barnett passed away on January 2, 2004 at age 102.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Etta Moten Barnett was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 16, 1999 and February 4, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Singer and community leader Etta Moten Barnett (1901 - 2004) performed in Broadway's legendary productions of "Sugar Hill", "Lysistrata" and as Bess in "Porgy and Bess", her signature role. Barnett was the first African American to sing at the White House and also served as an United States representative on cultural missions to ten African nations.

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:

Barnett, Etta Moten, 1902-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Barnett, Etta Moten, 1902- --Interviews

African American singers--Interviews.

African American entertainers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Stage Actress

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 Etta Moten Barnett, December 16, 1999 and February 4, 1993. 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 Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_001_001, TRT: 0:20:00 ?

This tape contains footage from an interview recorded on February 4, 1993, that has not been described.

Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

This tape contains footage from an interview recorded on February 4, 1993, that has not been described.

Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_002_003, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Etta Moten Barnett talks about the discovery of her musical talent at a young age, and her father's origins, college education and his travels as an A.M.E. minister. Barnett details memories of visiting her paternal grandparents in Texas, one of whom emigrated from Ireland. She then recalls choosing her current home on the South Side of Chicago, and how she wanted the house filled with family, as she remembered her grandparents' home in Texas as a child. Etta Moten Barnett recalls her early music education at Paul Quinn College, where they maintained a secondary school for children. Barnett then talks about her experiences as a member of the Jackson Jubilee Singers in the 1920s and the types of songs they sang, from the popular to songs from Africa. She then reflects on the bad impression the United States had about Africa back then. Lastly, she recounts her failed first marriage and her decision to attend college at the University of Kansas on her friend's advice.

African American families.

Music--Study and teaching.

Paul Quinn College.

Jubilee Singers.

Marriage.

University of Kansas.

Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_002_004, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Etta Moten Barnett recalls the decision to have her three children raised by her parents while she attended University of Kansas in the 1930s. She then talks about the cooperation she got in college and everyone's desire to see her succeed. Barnett details refusing a local teaching job in order to move to New York and try her hand at acting. She then recalls her brief acting debut while working with author/playwright Zora Neale Hurston. Etta Moten Barnett then talks about her courtship with Claude Barnett and how he squired her home after her acting engagements in Chicago. Barnett then recalls her friendship with Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Du Bois, many of whom she met through Claude's affiliation with the Associated Negro Press. She then talks about her singing career and after her success and marriage to Claude, finally being able to bring her children home to Chicago. Lastly, Etta Moten Barnett talks about Claude's management of her career and fondly recalls their thirty-three year marriage.

African American families.

University of Kansas.

Acting--Illinois--Chicago.

Singing.

Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967.

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

Barnett, Claude, 1889-1967.

Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_002_005, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

Etta Moten Barnett talks about her husband, Claude Barnett, and their trips to Africa on behalf of the Associated Negro Press. She then gives her view on why she feels arts are important for the spiritualness of the society. Etta Moten Barnett reflects on the Civil Rights Movement from the past and fears modern society is becoming less human. She then speaks briefly on the importance of black history and her own legacy. She refuses to sing, despite being coaxed by the interviewer. Lastly, Etta Moten Barnett and her daughter, Sue Ish, describe photographs from her personal life and from her long theatrical career.

Barnett, Claude, 1889-1967.

Associated Negro Press.

Travel--Africa.

Civil rights movements--United States.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Etta Moten Barnett, Section A1999_005_002_006, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Etta Moten Barnett's daughter, Sue Brooks Ish, talks about being raised by her grandparents while her mother was attending college and pursuing a career. She speaks fondly of her mother's ability to stay connected to her family through her frequent letter writing. Sue Ish recalls her mother's encounter with racism while touring with the travelling company of 'Porgy and Bess.' She recounts stories of her great-grandmother's personality and her personal memories of her grandmother. Sue Ish then talks about her mother's talent as a singer and her ability to always find work. She recalls her biological father, his absenteeism and flashy behavior in comparison to her step-father Claude's stable and family-oriented ways. Sue then talks about her mother's role in the entertainment world and her travels to Africa with Claude Barnett. Sue Ish shares her views on the demise of the Associated Negro Press after her step-father died. Lastly, Sue talks about her mother's influence and legacy.

Mothers and daughters.

African Americans families.

Children of divorced parents.

African American entertainers.

Barnett, Claude, 1889-1967.

Associated Negro Press.