

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Abena Joan P. Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Abena Joan, 1928-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Abena Joan P. Brown,
Dates:	July 27, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:22:45).
Abstract:	Stage producer Abena Joan P. Brown (1928 - 2015) founded of the Creative Arts Foundation in 1971, the only African American full-service cultural arts collective in the country. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 27, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_009
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Abena Joan P. Brown was born on the South Side of Chicago. Brown was one of those rare individuals who was not only passionate about the creative arts, but also shrewd enough to see the need for organization. Over the years, Brown distinguished herself as a masterful businesswoman as well as an artist. With over one hundred-fifty professional theater productions to her credit, in addition to a Master's degree in Community Organization and Management from the University of Chicago, Brown was the driving force behind the 1971 creation of the eta Creative Arts Foundation, the only African American full service cultural arts collective in Chicago and the nation.

Her many honors included an Award of Merit from the Black Theater Alliance, The Paul Robeson Award from the Chicago African American Arts Alliance, the Governor's Award in the Arts and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Joseph Jefferson Committee. Brown was also cited as one of America's Top Business and Professional Women by *Dollars and Sense* magazine, and she was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame of Chicago in 1991. Always looking towards the future, Brown was committed to building eta Creative Arts Foundation. Her goal was to always provide a venue where the stories of African American people will be told "in the first voice" for generations to come.

Brown passed away on July 12, 2015 at age 86.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Abena Joan P. Brown was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 27, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Stage producer Abena Joan P. Brown (1928 - 2015) founded of the Creative Arts Foundation in 1971, the only African American full-service cultural arts collective in the country.

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:

Brown, Abena Joan, 1928-2015

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Abena Joan, 1928-2015--Interviews

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Stage 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 Abena Joan P. Brown, July 27, 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 Abena Joan P. Brown, Section A2000_009_001_001, TRT: 0:30:28 ?

Abena Brown talks about her neighborhood and her cultural awareness while growing up on the South Side of Chicago. She then recalls why she was sent to a Catholic boarding school after her mother discovered she was being truant. Brown then talks about her mother's strong personality and their relationship during her teenage years. She later talks about her early interest in dance and the arts, and shares her story about meeting Paul Robeson. Abena Brown recalls the social clubs of her teens and discusses their importance in the socialization of young men and women. She then reflects on her experience as an undergraduate in college and details her first encounter with racial discrimination while there. Lastly, she discusses her decision to attend the University of Chicago for her graduate study.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Chicago.

Catholic schools--Illinois--Chicago.

African American mothers.

Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976.

Education, Secondary.

University of Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Abena Joan P. Brown, Section A2000_009_001_002, TRT: 0:30:42 ?

Abena Brown talks about her experiences at the University of Chicago and what she learned there. She then recalls her early acting experiences and her local participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Brown then talks about the origins of the eta Creative Arts Foundation and the people who helped her in its early development stages. She then talks about the similarities between New York and Chicago theater in relation to the Black Arts Movement, and explains why she prefers Chicago's theater scene. Brown also discusses the current financial state of black theater companies, especially the older established companies on the East Coast. She then talks about the economic impact of the age demographic on the overall theater scene. Abena Brown then shares the story of how author Dempsey Travis helped her secure eta's present home on the South Side. Lastly she talks about her staff and the success stories of actors who as children attended eta's programs.

University of Chicago.

Civil rights movements--Illinois--Chicago.

ETA Creative Arts Foundation.

African American theater.

Travis, Dempsey J. (Dempsey Jerome), 1920-2009.

Black Arts movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Abena Joan P. Brown, Section A2000_009_001_003, TRT: 0:21:35 ?

Abena Brown details extensively the future plans of the eta Creative Arts Foundation. She then talks about her legacy and the hope that eta will live on well after she is gone. Brown shares the story of how she made her first trip to Africa in 1970, and how she no longer questions her identity after visiting there. Lastly, Abena Brown talks about her mother's death, her purpose in life, and the influence the African peoples have on the arts, globally.

ETA Creative Arts Foundation.

Travel--Africa.

African American mothers--Death.

Art and race.