

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Adelaide Cromwell

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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>	Cromwell, Adelaide M.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Adelaide Cromwell,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 2, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:17:39).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Academic administrator and sociology professor Adelaide Cromwell (1919 - ) was the first African American instructor at Hunter College in New York and Smith College. Cromwell also helped to establish the school's African Studies program and earned the honor of professor emeritus at Boston University. Cromwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2004, in Brookline, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_243
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Boston University professor emeritus Adelaide McGuinn Cromwell was born on November 27, 1919, in Washington, D.C. In 1936, Cromwell graduated from Dunbar High School and in 1940, went on to earn an A.B. degree in sociology from Smith College. One year later, she earned a M.A. degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania and went on to earn a certificate in social casework from Bryn Mawr College. After earning a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard's Radcliffe College in 1946, she became the first African American instructor at

Hunter College in New York and then at her alma mater, Smith College.

From 1951 to 1985, she worked as professor of sociology at Boston University. In 1951, Cromwell was a leading member of the committee that established Boston University's African Studies Program. In 1953, she was appointed as administrator and research associate of the program. In 1969, Cromwell was appointed director of Boston University's graduate program in Afro-American Studies.

In 1960, Cromwell convened the first conference of West African social workers in Ghana. That same year, she was the only woman and African American appointed to a five-member committee commissioned by the Methodist Church in America to assess the state of higher education in what was then called the Belgian Congo. In 1983, Cromwell convened a conference of African American scholars and policymakers at the University of Liberia in Monrovia in 1983.

Cromwell has been recognized by a broad community of educators, administrators, and policymakers. She was appointed to the executive council of the American Society of African Culture, the American Negro Leadership Conference in Africa and the advisory council on Voluntary Foreign Aid. She maintains active membership in the Council on Foreign Relations, the African Studies Association, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and the American Sociological Association.

Cromwell has been recognized for her outstanding contributions to academia with awards and honors that include a Citation from the National Order of Cote d'Ivoire, the Smith College Medal, and the Carter G. Woodson Medal from ASALH.

Cromwell is the author of significant books and articles and is the mother of one son, Anthony Cromwell Hill. In retirement, her current research is on the history of her family as black intellectuals.

Cromwell passed away on June 8, 2019.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Adelaide Cromwell was conducted by Robert Hayden on December 2, 2004, in Brookline, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator and sociology professor Adelaide Cromwell (1919 - ) was the first African American instructor at Hunter

College in New York and Smith College. Cromwell also helped to establish the school's African Studies program and earned the honor of professor emeritus at Boston 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:**

Cromwell, Adelaide M.

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Cromwell, Adelaide M. --Interviews

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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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Boston University. Afro-American Studies.

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Boston University

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## **Occupations:**

Academic Administrator

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Sociology Professor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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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 Adelaide Cromwell, December 2, 2004. 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).

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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 Adelaide Cromwell, Section A2004\_243\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2004/12/02

Adelaide Cromwell was born November 27, 1919 in Washington D.C. to Yetta Mavritte Cromwell and John Wesley Cromwell, Jr. Her mother grew up in a tight-knit family, met Cromwell's father while his student at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in D.C. and eventually became a teacher. Cromwell's father was the son of the prominent John Wesley Cromwell, Sr., who was born into slavery, founded The People's Advocate and taught at Howard University. Cromwell's father graduated from Dartmouth College and became the first practicing black certified public accountant in 1921. He stressed education, but also valued learning outside of the textbooks. Her paternal aunt, Otelia Cromwell, was the first known

African American to graduate from Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1900. Cromwell grew up in a large townhouse in D.C. shared with extended family. Her aunt taught her until she entered the second grade at Garrison Elementary School. She also attended Garnet-Patterson Junior High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Adelaide Cromwell, Section A2004\_243\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:50 2004/12/02

Adelaide Cromwell took mandatory music and dance lessons and attended St. Luke's Episcopal Church while growing up in Washington, D.C. During the summers, she stayed at Camp Atwater in North Brookfield, Massachusetts and eventually became one of its camp counselors. She excelled at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, graduating at sixteen. Cromwell matriculated at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts at the encouragement of an aunt who was an alumna. At Smith, she took field trips to Boston; she also encountered racism, but her den mother and a friend came to her defense. Her interest in sociology was sparked by a professor that had taught E. Franklin Frazier; Frazier became a friend and mentor when she was interviewed for one of his research projects. She completed her master's in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where Kwame Nkrumah was a classmate, then studied social work at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. She met Henry A. Hill on a blind date and married him in 1943.

Video Oral History Interview with Adelaide Cromwell, Section A2004\_243\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:00 2004/12/02

Adelaide Cromwell experienced racial discrimination in her field placements as a social work student at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. When a director tried to place her at the one black-run agency, Cromwell insisted on being placed with the American Red Cross, which she found a valuable experience despite their racist reputation. Cromwell completed her Ph.D. in sociology at Harvard University's Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During this time, she taught at her alma mater, Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. After joining the faculty at Boston University, she helped found its African Studies Program and developed the

graduate program for Afro-American studies. In 1960, Cromwell convened the first conference of West African social workers in Ghana and joined a commission for the Methodist Church to assess the state of higher education in what was then the Belgian Congo. She also held a conference of African American scholars at the University of Liberia in Monrovia in 1983.

Video Oral History Interview with Adelaide Cromwell, Section  
A2004\_243\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:00 2004/12/02

Adelaide Cromwell was the first director of the Afro-American studies program at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts. Several students in the program went on to have prominent and successful careers. Adelaide Smith Casely-Hayford, whom she met in Africa, became the subject of her book, 'An African Victorian Feminist: The Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford 1868-1960.' Cromwell was fascinated by her life and activism and their similarities to Cromwell's own efforts in the United States. In 1985, she completed a study, 'Developing a Black Meritocracy: A History of Black Graduates of the Boston Latin School,' in an effort to improve educational outcomes for black students in Boston. Cromwell recalls debates regarding the purview of Boston University's African Studies Program. She describes her publications 'The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class 1750-1950,' which developed from her dissertation, and her feminist analysis of Harlem Renaissance novelists Dorothy West and Nella Larsen.

Video Oral History Interview with Adelaide Cromwell, Section  
A2004\_243\_001\_005, TRT: 0:18:19 2004/12/02

Adelaide Cromwell attended a Conference for Women of Africa and African descent in Ghana during Kwame Nkrumah's presidency. At the conference, she had a negative interaction with journalist Harold Isaacs. For her role in founding the African Studies Program and substantive academic contribution to Boston University, a suite of rooms on campus was named in her honor. Cromwell describes her future plans, hopes for the African American community, her legacy, and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes by narrating her photographs.

