

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janet Angel MacLachlan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	MacLachlan, Janet
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan,
Dates:	March 30, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:17:56).
Abstract:	Stage actress and film actress Janet Angel MacLachlan (1933 - 2010) appeared in over seventy-five television shows, including: I Spy, The FBI, Star Trek, The Fugitive, The Name of the Game, The Rockford Files, Good Times, Archie Bunker's Place, Cagney and Lacey, Amen, Murder She Wrote, Family Law, and Alias. In addition to a prolific television career, MacLachlan also appeared in numerous television and cinema movies. MacLachlan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 30, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_087
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Stage and film actress Janet Angel MacLachlan was born on August 8, 1933, in Harlem, New York; her mother, Iris South MacLachlan, and father, James MacLachlan, were both Jamaican born and members of the Church of the Illumination. Attending P.S. 170 and Julia Ward Junior High School, MacLachlan graduated from Julia Richmond High School in 1950, and earned her B.S. degree in psychology from Hunter College in 1955. While holding down clerical jobs MacLachlan studied acting at the Harlem YMCA, the Herbert Berghoff Acting Studio, and the Little Theatre of Harlem. Later, MacLachlan received additional training from The Actors Studio, Joanie Gerber Voiceovers, and Theatre East in Los Angeles.

In 1961, MacLachlan took Cicely Tyson's place in *The Blacks: A Clown Show* by Jean Genet, and worked alongside James Earl Jones, Louis Gossett, Jr., Maya Angelou, and Roscoe Lee Brown. In 1962, MacLachlan was cast in the parody *Raising Hell in the Sun* and became active in Actors Equity and The Committee for the Employment of Negro Performers. MacLachlan spent a year at Minneapolis' Tyrone Guthrie Theater and acted in Washington, D.C.'s Shakespeare Festival before she signed a contract with Universal Studios in 1964. Starting with *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* in 1965, MacLachlan appeared in over seventy-five television shows, including: *I Spy* (1967), *The FBI* (1966), *Star Trek* (1967), *The Fugitive* (1966), *The Name of the Game* (1969/70), *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970), *The Rockford Files* (1975), *Good Times* (1978), *Archie Bunker's Place* (1980), *Cagney and Lacey* (1982/83), *Amen* (1988), *Murder She Wrote* (1985), *Murder One* (1986), *Family Law* (2000), and *Alias* (2002). MacLachlan's television movies included: *Louis Armstrong - Chicago Style* (1976), *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (1978), *The Sophisticated Gents* (1981), *For Us the Living: The Medgar Evers Story* (1983), and *The Tuskegee Airmen* (1995). MacLachlan's feature films included: *Up Tight* (1968), *...tick...tick...tick* (1970), *The Man* (1972), *Souder* (1972), *Tightrope* (1984) and *Black Listed* (2003).

Often cast as a judge, nurse, doctor, psychiatrist, teacher, or social worker, MacLachlan was also featured in the Emmy Award winning KCET-TV PBS production of *Voices of Our People: In Celebration of Black Poetry*. MacLachlan served as the grant committee chair of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, while remaining a resident of Los Angeles.

Janet MacLachlan passed away on October 11, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 30, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Stage actress and film actress Janet Angel MacLachlan (1933 - 2010) appeared in over seventy-five television shows, including: I Spy, The FBI, Star Trek, The Fugitive, The Name of the Game, The Rockford Files, Good Times, Archie Bunker's Place, Cagney and Lacey, Amen, Murder She Wrote, Family Law, and Alias. In addition to a prolific television career, MacLachlan also appeared in numerous television and cinema movies.

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:

MacLachlan, Janet

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
MacLachlan, Janet--Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

African American television personalities--Interviews

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Stage Actress

Film Actress

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|EntertainmentMakers

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 Janet Angel MacLachlan, March 30, 2005. 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 Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_001, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan was born on August 27, 1933 in New York, New York. Her maternal great-grandmother moved from Germany to Jamaica, married MacLachlan's great-grandfather, a black Jamaican man, and ran a plantation. MacLachlan's mother, Iris South MacLachlan, was born in 1910 at the prison in Kingston, Jamaica where her parents worked. She was sent to a convent school before her family relocated to New York City, where she became a hairdresser. MacLachlan's father, James McLachlan, born in Albert Town, Jamaica in 1895, became a chiropractor. He believed his father was killed by poisoning, though other family members disputed his account. During World War I, he became a sergeant in the British Army due to his advanced literacy. After working on the construction of the Panama Canal, he went to New York City and met MacLachlan's mother at church. After they married, she added an 'A' to their last name for good luck. As an infant, MacLachlan played with balls of yarn from her maternal grandmother's knitting.

African American actresses--Interviews.

African American television personalities--Interviews.

African American motion picture actors and actresses--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_002, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan grew up in New York, New York and, with her family, attended the Rosicrucian First Church of Illumination. In addition to his chiropractic work, her father was a Rosicrucian minister and on the Church of Illumination's board in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. In Harlem, her family lived on St. Nicholas Avenue. Because of a heart condition, MacLachlan was kept from physical activities; from a window, she often watched her older brother play. As a child, she enjoyed reading fantasy and fiction and seeing movies on Saturdays. At P.S. 170, she skipped second grade. She attended Julia Ward Howe Junior High School and Julia Richman High School, all-girls schools in New York City. After her brother moved to Quakertown, the rest of her family eventually followed, and her mother passed away from bladder cancer there in the mid-1970s. Her brother, a chiropractor, passed away in 1992. MacLachlan recalls her self-perception as a child and young adult, noting her self-consciousness about her appearance.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan was a shy child, yet in fourth grade, she suggested to her favorite teacher that she play the lead in the spring play despite another girl already being cast for the part; her teacher agreed and MacLachlan performed, however, her classmates were angered by her taking the role from the other girl.

In high school, MacLachlan did not participate in theater, though she took part in other school activities. After graduating in 1950, MacLachlan spent the summer working for New York Life Insurance Company before enrolling at Hunter College in New York City. She attended the college's Bronx Campus for two years. Pledging Alpha Kappa Alpha allowed her to be more social than she had been during her strict upbringing. During college, she was involved with the Little Theater of Harlem YMCA, and through that met HistoryMaker Billy Taylor and Sidney Poitier whose restaurant, Ribs in the Ruff, she frequented in Harlem. MacLachlan completed her degree in psychology while working various jobs.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan, despite her mother's disapproval, became increasingly involved with the theater scene in New York City in an effort to escape her restrictive home life. She studied acting at Herbert Berghof Studio and, in her final semester, had her first acting class at Hunter College. After graduating in 1955, MacLachlan worked at Special Markets Inc., the first African American-run brokerage company on Wall Street. She followed the firm's vice president, John T. Patterson, Jr., when he left to head Financial Industrial Fund Inc. and continued working when the firm was bought out by McDonald, Holman & Company. In 1961, after traveling to Europe, MacLachlan worked with a theater group from the 92nd Street YMCA. A stage manager invited her to see a performance of Jean Genet's 'The Blacks: A Clown Show,' which led to her becoming an understudy for the show concurrently with her understudy role in the off-Broadway 'Moon on a Rainbow Shawl,' both starring HistoryMaker James Earl Jones and Cicely Tyson.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_005, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan briefly took over the role of Stephanie Virtue Diop in 'The Blacks: A Clown Show' before appearing in 'Raising Hell in the Son,' an off-Broadway spoof on 'A Raisin in the Sun.' Her parents were initially skeptical of her acting career, although her mother warmed to it after MacLachlan was featured in the New York Times. Tyrone Guthrie hired her for his repertory company in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Tired of being cast in small, non-speaking roles in plays such as 'Hamlet' and 'Death of a Salesman,' MacLachlan left the Tyrone Guthrie Theater and returned to New York, New York to expand her resume. She appeared as Titania in a production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at Washington, D.C.'s Shakespeare Festival. In 1964, she signed with Universal Studios Inc. and moved to Los Angeles, California where she acted in 'The Alfred Hitchcock Hour' and was loaned out for 'The FBI' before the company dropped her in 1966. MacLachlan's career took off, however, after accepting a role in 'I Spy.'

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_006, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan was one of the first black women to appear on TV with a natural hairstyle; although many saw this as a political statement, she did so for comfort. When cast as the love interest of Bill Cosby's character in an episode of 'I Spy,' MacLachlan asked HistoryMaker Maya Angelou to help her portray the character's African accent and mannerisms, though clothing for the role proved hard to find. In the 1970s, MacLachlan became involved with political and professional organizations, joining Women Against Violence Against Women as a spokesperson and the board of the Screen Actors Guild to

assess the employment rates for women and ethnic actors. In 1970, her daughter, Samantha MacLachlan, was born. After the 1980 actors strike, MacLachlan traveled with a group of actors to East Germany. Between 1982 and 1987, she worked for Communications Bridge Institute, a nonprofit program dedicated to teaching videography and sound work. MacLachlan reflects upon her impressions of the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_007, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan played the wife of Jim Brown's character in '...tick...tick...tick...' in 1970. In 1972, she portrayed HistoryMaker James Earl Jones' daughter in 'The Man' and a schoolteacher in 'Sounder.' She left her position at Communications Bridge Institute in 1987. Upon deciding to become sober, she joined Alcoholics Anonymous and devoted more attention to supporting her daughter's college education. After leaving the Screen Actors Guild in the 1980s, she chaired the membership committee for the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, then joined the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' scholarship committee. MacLachlan reflects upon the roles available for African American actresses and the way colorism and beauty standards factor into casting decisions. In listing her favorite acting roles, she notes her parts in 'The Man,' 'Gabriel's Fire' and 'I Spy.' She concludes the tape by talking about theater roles, such as Gertrude in 'Hamlet,' that she wanted to play.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_008, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan chaired the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' grants committee, which provided funding mainly to college and universities' film study departments. As a member who has voted for the Academy Awards, MacLachlan shares her perspective on the recognition of African American actors and actresses, including Halle Berry, Denzel Washington and Jamie Foxx, during the early 2000s. MacLachlan considers the impact of the Academy's voting system and her ideal roles and projects, such as directing children's movies. In talking about her upcoming reading for HistoryMaker Hattie Winston's role in 'The Old Settler,' MacLachlan notes the greater opportunities for black women in theater as opposed to television. Although a member of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, she no longer votes for the awards, given her strong preferences when it comes to television shows. MacLachlan describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon her life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Angel MacLachlan, Section A2005_087_001_009, TRT: 0:20:22 ?

Janet Angel MacLachlan describes how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the tape by narrating her photographs.