

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hattie Winston Wheeler

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Winston, Hattie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler,
Dates:	October 7, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:17:53).
Abstract:	Actress Hattie Winston (1945 -) has been recognized with an Obie Award, among other honors. Winston's theatre credits include, "Hair," "The Tap Dance Kid," and, "To Take Up Arms." Her television and film credits include, "Jackie Brown," "Becker," and, "True Crime." Wheeler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2005, in Encino, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_237
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress Hattie Mae Winston was born in Lexington, Mississippi, on March 3, 1945, to Selena Thurmond Winston and Roosevelt Love Winston. Winston was raised by her grandmother, Cora Thurmond, in nearby Greenville, Mississippi. Attending Washington Irving High School in New York City, Winston graduated in 1963; throughout her academic career she was an accomplished student and an exceptionally talented vocalist. Winston attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. after receiving a full voice scholarship.

Winston moved back to New York City after one year at Howard and enrolled in an actor's group study workshop; success came quickly. In 1968, Winston became a replacement performer in *Hair*, in 1969 obtained a part in *Does a Tiger Wear a Necktie?*, and in 1970 was cast in *The Me Nobody Knows*, all of which were significant Broadway roles. In 1971, Winston was cast in a replacement role in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In 1983, Winston scored a starring role in the critically acclaimed Broadway play *The Tap Dance Kid*. Winston's roles in *To Take Up Arms* and *Up the Mountain* earned her two Los Angeles Critics Drama-Logue awards; throughout her career, she received a variety of other theatrical honors, including two Obie Awards (for *Mother Courage* and *The Michigan*), CEBA Awards, and an Audelco Award for her contributions to the world of theater. Winston also worked as an independent producer and director, and was responsible for reviving Langston Hughes's *Black Nativity* off-Broadway.

Winston worked extensively in the worlds of television and film; she had a regular role on the Emmy-award winning PBS-TV series *The Electric Company*, where she played Sylvia, in addition to playing Gloria Davis in the critically acclaimed series *Homefront*. Winston's other television credits include *Nurse, E.R., Port Charles, The Parent Hood, Malcolm & Eddie, The Smart Guy, Scrubs*, and *Becker*. Winston's film credits include *Jackie Brown, Meet the Deedles, Beverly Hills Cop III*, and Clint Eastwood's *True Crime*.

Winston served as the national co-chair for the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)'s Equal Employment Opportunities Committee. In 1993 and 1997, the National Black Theater Festival in Winston-Salem, North Carolina honored Winston with the designation of a "Hattie Winston Day." Over the course of her career, Winston collected scripts and screenplays by African American writers, many of which remain unpublished; in 1998, she donated a collection of writing entitled the Hattie Winston African American Scripts and Screenplays Collection to the University of Louisville in Kentucky. In 2006, Winston participated in the reading "Slave Narratives: A Mighty, Mighty People" for Stories On Stage, a non-profit performing arts organization presenting popular local and national actors in dramatic readings of short fiction.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler was conducted by Paul Brock on October 7, 2005, in Encino, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actress Hattie Winston (1945 -) has been recognized with an Obie Award, among other honors. Winston's theatre credits include, "Hair," "The Tap Dance Kid," and, "To Take Up Arms." Her television and film credits include, "Jackie Brown," "Becker," and, "True Crime."

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:

Winston, Hattie

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Scott, Carolyn (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Winston, Hattie--Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actress

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Hattie Winston Wheeler, October 7, 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 6/7/2022 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 Hattie Winston Wheeler, Section A2005_237_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00 2005/10/07

Hattie Winston was born on March 3, 1945 in Lexington, Mississippi to Selena Thurmond Winston and Roosevelt Love Winston. Her paternal great-great-grandmother, Kizzie Rancher, was a farmer in Sumter County, Alabama, and raised Winston's grandmother, Ola Rancher Winston, who was born in 1894. Her father, Roosevelt Winston, was born in Morgan County, Mississippi in 1925, and grew up on his family's farm. Winston recalls her grandfather, William Love Winston's home as a two-room shack with a potbelly stove, where pig roasts were often held at festival times. Her father did not finish high school, and joined the U.S. Navy as a young man. When she was still a toddler, her biological mother abandoned the family. Winston was then raised by her paternal aunt, Bertha Mae Winston Williams. Few of her relatives on her father's side were literate, but her adoptive mother and other family members had great hope that Winston would become the first in the family to complete her education.

African American actresses--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler, Section A2005_237_001_002, TRT: 0:28:15 2005/10/07

Hattie Winston was adopted by her paternal aunt and uncle, Bertha Mae Winston Williams and Lewis Pampley, and considered them her parents. She grew up in Greenville, Mississippi, where her adoptive mother was a domestic servant and her adoptive father was a foreman at the lumber mill, where he supervised both white and black workers. Winston recalls her childhood scorn toward whites who addressed her adoptive mother by her first name, and how her adoptive father bought her a bicycle. Her adoptive mother ran an illegal bootlegging business, so Winston was taught how to cover her tracks in the event of police investigation. Winston attended Sacred Heart School in Greenville, a Catholic school where most of her teachers were white nuns, although her family was not Catholic. She was often teased and attacked by students from the community's public school, Coleman High School, until her adoptive mother urged her to fight back. Winston recalls how her adoptive parents were religious counselors in the community.

Video Oral History Interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler, Section A2005_237_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30 2005/10/07

Hattie Winston enjoyed singing while growing up in Greenville, Mississippi, and dreamed of entering show business. She saw movies starring black actors like Dorothy Dandridge and Herb Jeffries at Bridges' Theatre in Greenville. Winston reflects on the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and the murder of Emmett Till. After experiencing prejudice and harassment in the South, she moved to New York City at the age of thirteen, but returned to Mississippi after a year to care for her adoptive mother, Bertha Mae Winston Williams. At the age of fifteen, Winston moved to New York City for good, and lived with her father, Roosevelt Love Winston, in the Lower East Side. She attended Washington Irving High School, where she joined the drama club and qualified for the all-city choir. After experiencing troubles at home, she left to live with the family of her best friend, Adrienne Thomas, in the Chelsea Houses projects. She entered Howard University in 1963 with a full scholarship to study vocal performance.

Video Oral History Interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler, Section A2005_237_001_004, TRT: 0:29:35 2005/10/07

Hattie Winston dropped out of Howard University in Washington, D.C. after one year in order to pursue an acting career in New York City. In 1964, she joined the Group Theater Workshop, founded by HistoryMaker Robert Hooks, where she performed alongside HistoryMakers Douglas Turner Ward and Barbara Ann Teer. Winston performed in plays like 'The Prodigal Son' and Ward's 'Happy Ending/Day of Absence,' and was a founding member of the Negro Ensemble Company in 1967. She recalls the company's training regimen and commitment to ensemble work. In 1969, the Negro Ensemble Company represented the U.S. at the World Theatre Season in London, England, presenting 'Song of the Lusitanian Bogey.' In 1970, Winston made her first Broadway appearance in the musical 'The Me Nobody Knows.' She joined the cast of the TV series 'The Electric Company' in 1973, and later did promotional work for brands like Zest soap and American Airlines. Winston also recalls being neighbors with HistoryMaker Whoopi Goldberg in the Chelsea Houses.

Video Oral History Interview with Hattie Winston Wheeler, Section A2005_237_001_005, TRT: 0:22:33 2005/10/07

Hattie Winston was introduced to voiceover acting by Adolph Caesar. She often had to omit mention of her race in order to be considered for jobs. Her television credits include 'Nurse' with Michael Learned in the early 1980s, 'Homefront' with Dick Anthony Williams in the early 1990s, and 'Becker' with Ted Danson from 1998 to 2004. Winston also appeared in movies, including 'Jackie Brown' with Samuel L. Jackson, 'True Crime' with Clint Eastwood, and 'Clara's Heart' with HistoryMaker Whoopi Goldberg, her former neighbor in New York City. Winston is active in the community as a member of the anti-domestic violence organization Break the Cycle, the co-founder of Onyx Village, and a member of the CEO committee of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. She premiered her play 'The Slave Narratives' at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts with a cast including HistoryMakers James Avery and Charles Weldon. Winston also describes how she would like to be remembered and narrates her photographs.