

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe

PERSON

Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne M., 1951-

Alternative Names: Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne Moutoussamy, 1951-

Life Dates: July 9, 1951-

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois

Residence: New York, NY

Occupations: Photographer; Civic Activist

Biographical Note

Photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe was born on July 9, 1951 in Chicago, Illinois. Art has been a life-long pursuit for Moutoussamy-Ashe. Her mother, Elizabeth Moutoussamy, an interior designer and father, John Moutoussamy, an architect, encouraged her artistic side. Taking advantage of the opportunities available to them in Chicago, she began her formal training at age eight when her parents enrolled her in classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. When it was time for undergraduate studies, Moutoussamy-Ashe moved east to New York and received a B.F.A. degree in photography from The Cooper Union School of Art. After graduating in 1975, she worked as a graphic artist and photojournalist for WNBC-TV. In October 1976, Moutoussamy-Ashe was hired to take photographs at the United Negro College Fund tennis event, where she met tennis great, Arthur Ashe. The two married on February 20, 1977.

Throughout her career, Moutoussamy-Ashe has had frequent group and solo exhibitions at museums and galleries around the world including the Leica Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York; the Smithsonian and the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.; Galerie Herve Odermat in Paris and The Excelsior in Florence among others. Publications such as "Life Magazine," "The New York Times," "People" and the Associated Press have also featured her photography, disseminating it to a wider audience. In 2001, she hosted the documentary "Crucible of the Millennium," which PBS broadcast nationwide.

Moutoussamy-Ashe also taught photography courses at the high school and

college levels and continues to lecture about this subject matter at many educational and cultural institutions. Outside of the field of photography, she has been actively engaged in philanthropic efforts involving social, health, and community-based issues. As an activist and civic leader, she has served as the director of the Arthur Ashe Endowment for the Defeat of AIDS, a former trustee of her alma mater, The Cooper Union, and a one-time Alternate Representative of the United States to the United Nations, a presidential appointment.

Her photographs contain strong narrative and documentary elements. Moutoussamy-Ashe has displayed a proclivity towards African and African American art. This is evident in the three full collections documenting her travels in West Africa or her book about the Gullah community of South Carolina, "Daufuskie Island: A Photographic Essay." She reveals her immediate personal experience in "Daddy and Me," which features photos of her late husband, Arthur Ashe, and her daughter, Camera. She has published numerous books featuring not only her own work, but also that of unknown black photographers of the past. In 2001, her fourth book of photographs was published, titled "The African Flower: The Singing of Angels." The narrative of her photographs extends beyond a picture or a series of pictures to create a greater context for the artist herself within photography, womanhood and the African American experience.

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 15, 2007 and April 15, 2007.

Related Entries

Walker, Julia [GRANDCHILDOf]
Paternal Grandmother

Moutoussamy, Jean Marie [GRANDCHILDOf]
Paternal Grandfather

Moutoussamy, John [CHILDOf]
Father

Ashe, Camera [PARENTOf]
Daughter

Hunt, Annie [GRANDCHILDOf]
Maternal Grandmother

Moutoussamy, Jr., John [SIBLINGOf]
Brother

Moutoussamy, Elizabeth [CHILDOf]
Mother

Ashe, Arthur [SPOUSEOf]
Husband

Moutoussamy, Claude [SIBLINGOf]
Brother

Burnside Elementary School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Chicago International Charter [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

The College of New Rochelle [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Cooper Union [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

NBC Television Network [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 01-1973 to ?]

Graphic Designer and Photographer

Marshall Field's (Department store) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to 1967]

Intern and Model

Johnson Publishing Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1969 to 1969]

Tour Guide and Switchboard

[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1971 to 1973]

Teacher and Student

[MEMBEROF]

Arthur Ashe Endowment for the Defeat of AIDS (AAEDA) [MEMBEROF]
Chair

Reading in Fundamental, Inc. [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

United Nations [MEMBEROF]
U.S. delegate

Dalton School (New York, N.Y.) [MEMBEROF]
Teacher

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe Manuscript and Research Collection Schomburg Center
for Research in Black Culture