



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe,
Dates:	January 15, 2007 and April 15, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:54:30).
Abstract:	Photographer and civic activist Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (1951 -) wife of the late tennis star, Arthur Ashe has had many exhibitions and publications that capture the African and African American experience through photography. As an activist, she has served in many capacities, most notably, she was the director of the Arthur Ashe Endowment for the Defeat of AIDS. Moutoussamy-Ashe was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 15, 2007 and April 15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois and New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_008
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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 focus on 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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 15, 2007 and April 15, 2007, in Chicago, IllinoisNew York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacam SP videocassettes. Photographer and civic activist Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe (1951 -) wife of the late tennis star, Arthur Ashe has had many exhibitions and publications that capture the African and African American experience through photography. As an activist, she has served in many capacities, most notably, she was the director of the Arthur Ashe Endowment for the Defeat of AIDS.

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:

Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne, 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai

Burghelea, Neculai

(Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne, 1951---Interviews.

African American women photographers--Interviews.

AIDS activists--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

CivicMakers

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 Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, January 15, 2007 and April 15, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/3/2011 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, January 15, 2007, April 15, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:22 2007/01/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe and her aunt, Bernadette “Bernie” Moutoussamy-Harris, a retired educator, begin with a discussion of their family genealogy. Together, they focus on Moutoussamy-Ashe’s paternal family history. Moutoussamy-Ashe’s father, John Warren Moutoussamy, Sr., was born in Chicago, Illinois, on January 5, 1922. Her grandfather for whom she was named, Jean Marie Moutoussamy, was born in Saint-Francois, Guadeloupe, in the 1850s or 1860s. Moutoussamy-Ashe explores the origins of her maiden name, noting that it was initially Moutouswami, a common name in Southern India—the place from which her great-grandparents moved en route to Saint-Francois. She goes on to discuss how her grandparents, Jean Marie Moutoussamy and Julia Walker, met in New Orleans, Louisiana and married in approximately 1918. In discussing her paternal family, Moutoussamy-Ashe emphasizes the important role her Aunt Bernadette played as matriarch of their family. Moutoussamy-Ashe continues the conversation by talking about her grandmother’s Catholic roots. In close, the discussion shifts to Aunt Bernadette and other family members’ education and occupations.

African American Catholics.

Saint-Francois (Guadeloupe).

West Indies, French--Emigration and immigration.

African American Families--New Orleans--Louisiana.

African American architects.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:38 2007/01/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe begins by discussing her father, John Warren Moutoussamy, Sr. and his secondary education at Englewood High School and his undergraduate studies at Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago, Illinois, financed by the G.I. Bill. She goes on to talk about her early experiences as a college student at Cooper Union College in New York, where a chance encounter with Jack White, the principal of the institution, revealed to Moutoussamy-Ashe his role in helping her father become a recipient of the GI Bill. Admiring her father’s career as an architect, Moutoussamy-Ashe talks at

length about the various buildings he constructed, including her childhood home on the south side of Chicago. She also mentions the architectural firms he worked for, namely, PACE Associates and subsequently Dubin, Dubin & Black, where he later became a partner. Moutoussamy-Ashe notes the influence that Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Staatliches Bauhaus had on her father's architectural style. They also discuss Aunt Bernie's career as a teacher; her employment with the publishing company, Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, where she helped to develop curriculums and write math textbooks.

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

United States. Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

Chicago architecture and urbanism.

African American--Father-daughter relationships.

African American architects.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:40 2007/01/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe turns her attention to her maternal family history. Her mother, Elizabeth Rose Hunt Moutoussamy, was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on June 29, 1922. Hunt Moutoussamy came to Chicago in 1924, and was raised by her mother and grandmother, Annie M. Hunt Foster alongside her nine siblings. Moutoussamy-Ashe reflects upon her mother's talents as a songstress and the various big band acts she performed with including Johnny Hartman and Cab Callaway. She contends that her mother's career as a vocalist was curtailed by an ultimatum: marriage or pursue her singing career on the road. She chose to marry Moutoussamy-Ashe's father, John Moutoussamy, Sr., converted to Catholicism, yet continued singing at numerous Baptist and Catholic churches. Moutoussamy-Ashe describes her mother as a talented and beautiful woman, who was a victim of the conventional ideas of a patriarchal society which required women to devote most of their attention to the home. Moutoussamy-Ashe's mother died on February 13, 2006 at the age of eighty-three. She talks about how her grandmother embraced the West African tradition of wearing white to the funerals and/or burial of their children. Moutoussamy-Ashe adds that such traditions signified the celebration of life rather than death. Moutoussamy-Ashe also describes being introduced to photography by a childhood friend.

Social Values.

Gender and culture.

Funeral rites and ceremonies--Africa, West.

Marriages--African Americans.

Parents Death.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_001_004,
TRT: 0:28:32 2007/01/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe begins by tracing her education. She attended Burnside Elementary School for kindergarten, and she was enrolled from 1st to 8th grade at St. Joachim Catholic School, both schools are located in Chicago, Illinois. Moutoussamy-Ashe recalls her first holy communion and the dress her mother created for the occasion. For high school, Moutoussamy-Ashe entered the Academy of Our Ladies in 1965, an all girl-school also known as Longwood High School. She notes the dearth of African American people living in the community surrounding her high school and the institution's low number of black students. After graduating in 1969, Moutoussamy-Ashe attended Mundelein College in Chicago. Her favorite subjects while in primary

and secondary school were art and music. She discusses her decision to move and enroll in the Cooper Union Art School in New York, New York, in 1971. She discusses various techniques, methods, and genres related to the field of photography, such as visual imagery and the use of pictures in newspapers and magazines. Moutoussamy-Ashe also talks about her first exhibition of photographs at the Benin Gallery in Harlem, New York. She concludes with a discussion of how her artwork is informed by the social context of the African American community.

African American Photographers--Exhibitions.

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Exhibitions.

Catholic schools--Illinois--Chicago.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Illinois, Chicago.

Art school.

Mundelein College.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Illinois, Chicago.

African Americans--Education (Higher).

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:31 2007/01/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe describes her husband, Arthur Ashe, and his meteoric rise to become one of the country's leading tennis players. Ashe, she contends, made history as the first African American man to win the Wimbledon tournament in England in 1975. This event, she argues, often eclipses Ashe's earlier victory at the 1968 U.S. Open. At the time, Ashe was also a lieutenant in the U.S. Army at West Point in New York. Moutoussamy-Ashe goes on to discuss the Civil Rights era, specifically 1968, noting the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy; riots taking place in urban communities throughout the United States; and the struggle of black cadets at West Point Military Academy. She then discusses the first time she met Ashe in October 1976 at the United Negro College Fund tennis event. Moutoussamy-Ashe was there taking photographs at the urging of famed photographer, Gordon Parks. She discussed their brief courtship and marriage on February 20, 1977. Throughout their marriage, Ashe experienced a number of health issues, including a congenital heart condition. Moutoussamy-Ashe shifts to a discussion about her time in South Africa, the system of apartheid and Ashe's political conscience.

Ashe, Arthur.

African American--Social activists.

U.S. Open (Tennis tournament).

African American tennis players.

Civil Rights movement.

Marriages--African American.

United States Military Academy.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006.

Apartheid--Africa, Southern.

Congenital heart disease--Complications.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_002_006,
TRT: 0:29:42 2007/04/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe discusses her book entitled, "Daufuskie Island: A Photographic Essay," which was inspired by a six-month independent study in West Africa while she was a student at Cooper Union College. The book was equally inspired by her research on the eastern shore sea islands in South Carolina and Georgia and their connection to West Africa. She eventually took a tour of Daufuskie Island in January 1981, took photographs and began to market the book to publishers. The University of South Carolina Press published the book in 1982. In discussing Daufuskie, she is attentive to the drastic transformations that the island has undergone over the years. Moutoussamy-Ashe talks about the challenges related to publishing fine art photography books, her interest in the history of photography and the lineage of African American women photographers, and the nascent years of her career as a photographer. She returns to the process of publishing, "Daufuskie Island," and her book, "Viewfinders: A History of Black Women Photographers," and the various exhibitions and shows that stemmed from these books, including one that took place in London at The Elbow Room gallery. Moutoussamy-Ashe concludes by discussing her husband's health issues as a result of his AIDS diagnosis, its impact on their family and public life, and the burgeoning skepticism surrounding the disease in U.S. culture and society during the 1980s.

African Americans--Travel--Africa, West.

Daufuskie Island (S.C.)--Pictorial works.

African American photographers.

AIDS (Disease)--Diagnosis.

Women photographers.

Art publishing--United States.

Photographs--Publishing.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_002_007,
TRT: 0:29:08 2007/04/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe talks about how her husband, Arthur Ashe, battled various health issues throughout his life, including a congenital heart condition. He underwent bypass surgeries in 1979, 1981, and in 1983. The final one required a blood transfusion. In 1988, Ashe developed flu-like symptoms and his hand had gone numb. Thus he returned to the doctor to undergo a brain operation and through blood testing the doctors discovered that Ashe had full blown AIDS. Moutoussamy-Ashe continues to discuss the difficult task of informing family members about Ashe's status and their collective decision to initially not disclose this information to the public. She goes on to tell about Ashe's decision to make his AIDS diagnosis public in 1992, and the impact it had on their lives. Moutoussamy-Ashe turns her attention to the affect Ashe's health issues had on their daughter, Camera and how it inspired the publication of the book "Daddy and Me." After Ashe died on February 6, 1993, Moutoussamy-Ashe assumed the custodianship of Ashe's legacy and continued to build upon he work as a photographer and curator. She also talks about the bereavement process after losing a spouse and the struggle to publish her book "African Flower: The Singing of Angels." In close, Moutoussamy-Ashe discusses the pejorative comments made by Don Imus about the Rutgers women's basketball team, and the implications such thoughts have on the larger African American community.

Ashe, Arthur.

AIDS (Disease) Complications.

Bereavement.

Widowhood.

Imus, Don.

Rutger's Women's Basketball (Basketball team).

Video Oral History Interview with Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, Section A2007_008_002_008,
TRT: 0:28:57 2007/04/15

Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe continues to discuss Don Imus and his inflammatory comments about the Rutgers women's basketball team and she contemplates how she suspects Arthur Ashe would have responded. She thinks Ashe would have mobilized around this issue. In discussing her husband, she reflects upon his deep conscience and appreciation for political and social inclusiveness. Moutoussamy-Ashe goes on to discuss her work to preserve Ashe's legacy and promote global awareness about HIV/AIDS through the Arthur Ashe Foundation for the Defeat of AIDS, which was created while Ashe was still alive. She also mentions the \$1 million endowment used to inaugurate an international health care training program at New York Hospital that will serve patients with HIV/AIDS on a global scale. Returning to Ashe's activism, Moutoussamy-Ashe talks about his participation in the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa and her own appreciation for the country, particularly as it relates to her photography. She also mentions the republication of, "Daufuskie Island," among other book projects. Moutoussamy-Ashe admits that she is still working on what her legacy will mean to the generations that follow. Also she provides an update on her daughter, Camera's undergraduate studies in art history.

Imus, Don.

Rutgers Women's Basketball (Basketball team).

Photography--South Africa.

Social Activism.

African American--AIDS activists.

AIDS Support Organization.

Race relations--20th century.

Ashe-Arthur.