

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gail A. Hansberry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hansberry, Gail
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry,
Dates:	February 21, 2023 and February 9, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2023
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:52:54).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive and photographer Gail A. Hansberry (1939 -) served as executive director of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History from 1990 to 1992. Her photographs are housed at the New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Library of Congress. Hansberry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 21, 2023 and February 9, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_059
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Contractor and Graphic Artist/Photographer, Gail A. Hansberry was born in Washington, D.C. on September 4, 1939. Her mother, Myrtle Kelso Hansberry, taught French in a junior high school. Her father, William Leo Hansberry was a pioneer in the study of Ancient African History and taught at Howard University in Washington D.C. from 1922–1959. Hansberry attended public schools and during the 10th grade she lived in Cairo, Egypt, where her father was a Fulbright Research Scholar.

In 1960, Hansberry received her B.A. degree in Art from Howard University. In 1962 she received her M.A. degree in Art History from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, where she also took Leonard Baskin's graphics courses and made a book of etchings by hand entitled *Insects* (1962); a later enlarged version was entitled *Insects and Haiku* (1970).

In 1962-63 Hansberry worked in the Publications Office of the National Gallery of Art and taught art at Taft Junior High School in Washington, D.C. From 1963–1966 she was an instructor of Art History at North Carolina College (now North Carolina Central University) in Durham, N.C. In 1966, Hansberry moved to New York and was a researcher at Time Life Books from 1967-1976. Then, through 1979, she was a freelance editorial researcher and photographer in NY.

Hansberry returned to Washington, D.C. in 1980 and for about twenty eight years was an English Language Officer (ELO), contracted by the U.S. Department of State.

Organizations to which Hansberry has belonged include BPIA (International Association of Black Professional in International Affairs); AKA (Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority); (NCIV) National Council for International Visitors, and WBG (Washington Biography Group). From 1990 -1992 Hansberry served as executive director of the

Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).

Hansberry's prints and hand-made books are in private collections and at Smith College, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City and the Library of Congress. Hansberry did photographic studies of the George Washington Bridge in New York and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Two photographs of her study of the Brooklyn Bridge were included in its 1983 Centennial Exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum ("The Great East River Bridge 1883-1983".) Her photography is also included in the 2009 *Colors of Life*, published by The Exposure Group African American Photographers Association, Inc. of which she is a member. In addition, a transcript of a video interview with Hansberry was published in *Artist and Influence*, Vol. XXIX, 2010, in the Hatch-Billops Collection Inc, Archives of African American Cultural History.

Gail A. Hansberry was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 9, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gail A. Hansberry was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 21, 2023 and February 9, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit chief executive and photographer Gail A. Hansberry (1939 -) served as executive director of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History from 1990 to 1992. Her photographs are housed at the New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Library of Congress.

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:

Hansberry, Gail

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hansberry, Gail--Interviews

African American artists as teachers--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

African American photographers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Gail A. Hansberry, February 21, 2023 and February 9, 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 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 Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_001_001, TRT: 0:29:33
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Gail A. Hansberry was born on September 4, 1939 in Washington, D.C. to Myrtle Kelso Hansberry and William Leo Hansberry. Her maternal grandfather, Wiley Kelso, moved his family from Mississippi, where her mother was born, to Chicago, Illinois. There, he owned a restaurant, and Hansberry's mother received a degree in French from the University of Chicago. Hansberry's father was descended from slaves in Louisiana. His father, Elden Hayes Hansberry, was a professor at Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lorman, Mississippi before his early death. Hansberry's father studied at Atlanta University and Harvard University; and, upon graduation in 1921, taught at Straight College in New Orleans, Louisiana and at Howard University. In 1932, he returned to Harvard University to earn a master's degree, and then became a renowned historian of Africa at Howard University. His former student, Nigerian President Nnamdi Azikiwe, named the University of Nigeria's Hansberry Institute of African Studies in his honor.

African American fathers--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Migrations--History--20th century.

Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_001_002, TRT: 0:29:47
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Gail A. Hansberry was interested in astronomy as a child, and often looked at the stars with her father, African historian William Leo Hansberry. In Washington, D.C., her father founded the Africa House, and advised Nigerian and Ethiopian students at Howard University. Her father was a popular teacher, despite the administration's reluctance to approve his courses. His studies of Africa were influenced by his own father and by W.E.B. Du Bois' book, 'The Negro,' and he sometimes collaborated with classicist Frank M. Snowden, Jr. In Washington, D.C., Hansberry attended Lucretia Mott Elementary School, Slowe Elementary School and Benjamin Banneker Junior High School. Then, her family moved for one year to Cairo, Egypt, where her father conducted research. Hansberry's family occasionally visited her uncle, Carl Augustus Hansberry, and cousins, playwright Lorraine Hansberry and Mamie Hansberry, in Chicago, Illinois. She reflects upon her father's influence on Lorraine Hansberry's 'A Raisin in the Sun.'

African American children--Illinois--Chicago.

Hansberry, Lorraine, 1930-1965.

Hansberry, William Leo.

African diaspora.

Egypt--Social life and customs--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_001_003, TRT: 0:29:33
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Gail A. Hansberry's father founded the African American Institute in Washington, D.C., but spent most of his time advising students and caring for his family, including the children of his sister, Carrie Washington Fitchett, after her husband's death. In 1953, Hansberry's father won a Fulbright grant to conduct research in Egypt. Her family travelled by ship, and stopped in Spain, France and Italy before arriving in Alexandria, Egypt. In Cairo, they were often mistaken for Egyptians because of their skin color. During this time, Hansberry attended the Manor House School, where she learned French and joined the Girl Guides. Her family also travelled throughout Egypt with other Fulbright scholars, and visited Cairo's Mosque of Muhammad Ali. In 1954, Hansberry returned with her mother and sister to Washington, D.C., where she was among the first integrated class of students at McKinley Technical High School. She matriculated at Howard University in 1960, despite her reluctance to study where her father taught.

Howard University--Faculty.

Hansberry, William Leo.

United States--Race relations--History.

School integration--United States.

Egypt--Social life and customs--20th century.

Africa-America Institute.

African Americans--Education--Washington (D.C.).

School integration--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_001_004, TRT: 0:29:47
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Gail A. Hansberry joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority at Howard University. There, she studied art under Lois Mailou Jones and James A. Porter, both of whom she knew as a child. As a student, she met literary scholar Arthur P. Davis, who taught her general humanities course. Then, Hansberry earned a master's degree in art history at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. At both schools, Hansberry's professors were knowledgeable about African American art. Upon graduation in 1962, Hansberry studied rock painting with Louis Mailou Jones at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris. She returned to Washington, D.C., and worked at the National Gallery of Art while taking education courses at Howard University. In 1963, she was hired at Taft Junior High School, and taught a summer course at North Carolina College at Durham. While there, she took a trip to Mexico City, which required her to travel through the segregated South. Hansberry then moved to New York City to pursue her interest in bookmaking.

Howard University--Faculty.

Howard University--Students.

African American college students--Social life and customs.

African American educators.

African American artists as teachers.

Jones, Lois Mailou.
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.
National Gallery of Art (U.S.)--Employees.
Smith College.
African Americans--North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_001_005, TRT: 0:29:14
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Gail A. Hansberry worked for nine years as a researcher at New York City's Time-Life Books, where she conflicted with editors over falsities in the book 'Tropical Africa.' Hansberry then began working as a freelance photographer. She held one woman shows in the mid-1970s, and her photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge were exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in 1983. During this time, she met African American photographers like Dawoud Bey, Roy DeCarava, and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe. Hansberry also handmade an edition of 'Insects and Haiku,' a book of etchings and collected poems. From 1980, after her mother died and her grandmother fell ill in the same month, Hansberry cared for her family for several years. Then, she became an English language escort for the U.S. Department of State, where she guided tour groups through the country. She also served as the director of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History from 1990 to 1992. Additionally, Hansberry talks about the issue of human trafficking.

Time-Life Books--Employees.
African American photographers--Exhibitions.
African American civic leaders--Washington (D.C.).
Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc.
Women caregivers.

Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_002_006, TRT: 6:29:10
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Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_002_007, TRT: 7:28:55
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Video Oral History Interview with Gail A. Hansberry, Section A2007_059_002_008, TRT: 8:26:55
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