

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Askia Toure'

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Touré, Askia M.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure',
<b>Dates:</b>	April 10, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:28:41).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Poet, civil rights activist, and african american studies professor Askia Toure' (1938 - ) founded Afro World and organized the Harlem Uptown Youth Conference. Touré taught African history in the first Africana Studies Program at San Francisco State University, and authored a variety of books, plays, and has worked in film. Toure' was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 10, 2007, in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_131
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Professor and poet Askia M. Touré was born on October 13, 1938, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to Clifford Roland Snellings, Jr. and Nannie Lynette Bullock. Growing up, Touré attended Willard and Wogaman elementary schools. In 1952, Touré won a Motion Poetry Association Award while attending Roosevelt High School. Two years later, he participated in a successful sit-in at Roosevelt. Touré graduated from high school in 1956, and joined the United States Air Force. While serving alongside Robert Green of the Flamingos and Little Willie John, Touré wrote a letter to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell that resulted in a government investigation of racism at Wordsmith Air Force Base in Michigan.

After being discharged in 1959, Touré took art classes at the Dayton Art Institute. He then moved to New York City and joined the Art Student League and the Umbra Poets. He and his associates Tom Feelings, Tom Dent, David Henderson, and Calvin Herndon were mentored by Langston Hughes. Touré participated in the Fulton (Street) Art Fair in Brooklyn in 1961 and 1962, and the Black Arts Academy. Influenced by artists and writers such as Ernest Crichlow, Jacob Lawrence, Leo Carty, Elombe Brathe, Ronnie Braithwaite, Bob and Jean Gumbs, and Rose Nelmes of the Grandessa Models, Touré became a poet who championed a black aesthetic.

In 1961, Touré joined Max Roach, Abby Lincoln, Alex Prempe, May Mallory, and Maya Angelou at the United Nations to protest the assassination of Congo's Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In 1962, Touré became an illustrator for *Umbra* magazine, a staff member with *The Liberator* magazine, and a contributor to *Freedomways*. Touré was a part of the Atlanta staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and joined the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) in Mississippi in the Spring of 1964. In 1965, Touré founded *Afro World* and organized the Harlem Uptown Youth Conference. Touré also participated in the rise of the Black Panther Party and co-wrote SNCC's 1966 "Black Power Position Paper."

In 1967, Touré joined the staff of Nathan Hare at San Francisco State University and taught African history in the first Africana Studies Program. Touré organized the 1984 Nile Valley Conference in Atlanta and co-founded the Atlanta chapter of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in 1986. Touré authored multiple books and received the 1989 American Book Award for Literature (*From the Pyramids to the Projects*) and the 2000 Stephen E. Henderson Poetry Award (*Dawnsong*); other works include films and plays. In 1996, Touré was honored with the Gwendolyn Brooks Lifetime Achievement Award from the Gwendolyn Brooks Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Askia Toure' was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 10, 2007, in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet, civil rights activist, and african american studies professor Askia Toure' (1938 - ) founded Afro World and organized the Harlem Uptown Youth Conference. Touré taught African history in the first Africana Studies Program at San Francisco State University, and authored a variety of books, plays, and has worked in film.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Touré, Askia M.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Touré, Askia M.--Interviews

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African American authors--Interviews

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African American educators--Interviews

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African American civil rights workers--Interviews

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African American poets--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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Poet

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers|CivicMakers

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## **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 Askia Toure', April 10, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Askia Touré describes his family background and the influence of the Black Arts Movement. Touré was born Clifford Rolland Snellings, Jr. on October 13, 1938 in Raleigh, North Carolina. During the slating of his interview, he explains how he chose his African name, from Guinean military leader Samory Touré and Songhai Emperor Askia Mohammad I Touré. He contextualizes this within the pan-Africanism of the Black Arts Movement during the 1960s. Touré's mother, Nannie Bullock Snellings, was born around 1912 in Apex, North Carolina to brick mason Tom Bullock, who was said to be half Cherokee; and Julia Bullock, who used to tell Touré stories and sing him songs derived from West African myths. Her brothers were farmers. Touré's father, draftsman and engineer Clifford Rolland Snellings, Sr., was born in September 1915 in LaGrange, Georgia and graduated from the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia where he played football. His mother was Annie Mae Snellings.

African American authors--Interviews.

African American educators--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American poets--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:24 ?

Askia Touré recalls his early childhood. His father, Clifford Rolland Snellings, Sr., born in 1915 in LaGrange, Georgia, was a graduate of Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, and came from a prominent southwest Georgia family. Clifford's paternal grandparents were minister Reverend Randall Samuel Snellings, and Fannie Snellings, an early graduate of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. When Touré was a child, his parents left him in the care of his paternal grandmother, Annie Mae Snellings, so his father could seek work as a draftsman in Dayton, Ohio. He later became an aeronautical engineer. At the age of five, Touré joined his parents in Dayton during World War II. He remembers seeing African American soldiers in segregated rail cars. In Dayton, Touré lived in the Desoto Bass Courts Housing Project before moving to the city's West Side where he attended the Willard School, Wogaman Elementary School, and Roosevelt High School. Touré recalls the sights, sounds, and smells of growing up in Dayton.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:57 ?

Askia Touré describes he adolescence in Dayton, Ohio. During the 1950s, he sang in the choirs of Reverend George W. Lucas's Bethel Baptist Church and Dayton's Roosevelt High School, as well as in local doo-wop groups. He also attended live shows at the Classic, the Palace, and the Regal Theaters. Touré recalls influential teachers at Willard Elementary School and Roosevelt High School. He had an early affinity for painting, and spending time outdoors as a

youth in North Carolina and Dayton influenced his art. Touré talks about race relations at Roosevelt High School and how the administration under Principal Nettie Lee Roth exacerbated racial tensions. In 1954, Dayton civil rights activist W.S. McIntosh led a boycott of the segregated Teddy Bear restaurant, which led the Teddy Bear to begin serving African Americans. Despite this, Touré recalls tensions between McIntosh and more established African American leaders like Touré's father, who saw the former as a rabble-rouser.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

Askia Touré describes his military service and the beginning of his art career. He remembers the murder of Emmett Till in 1955. In 1956, he entered the U.S. Air Force after graduating from Roosevelt High School in Dayton, Ohio. He describes his experience of racial discrimination in the Air Force. While stationed in Youngstown, Ohio, Touré studied painting at the local Art Institute. He then transferred to Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Michigan, where he was the only African American airman. When black mechanics complained to him about racial discrimination, Touré wrote to New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. The Air Force subsequently announced a rank freeze and gave Touré an honorable discharge in 1959. He then moved to New York City to pursue his art career. There, he met artists like Tom Feelings and Jacob Lawrence along with Langston Hughes, and poets from the Umbra collective. Touré lived in Brooklyn and worked at a factory before settling in the East Village and working at an art gallery.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

Askia Touré recounts his career as an artist in New York City during the 1960s and his friendship with artist Tom Feelings. Touré gained the attention of artists like Jacob Lawrence and Ernest Crichlow by showcasing his paintings at the Fulton Art Fair in Brooklyn, New York. He talks about the influence of the Grandassa Models on the black beauty industry. The models, including Rose Nelmes, Jean Gumbs, and Helene Brathwaite, picketed wig stores and promoted natural hairstyles in their fashion shows. The shows featured emerging jazz musicians, vocalist Abbey Lincoln and percussionist Max Roach. Touré became increasingly involved in the pan-Africanist movement, and he recalls some of its major figures in Harlem, New York, like bookseller Lewis H. Michaux and historian Joel Augustus Rogers. With Rogers' help, Touré and Matthew Meade wrote a biography of Guinean freedom fighter Samory Touré, whose name Askia Touré (then Rolland Snellings) would later adopt as his own.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Askia Touré recounts his activism during the 1960s. After the 1961 assassination of Congolese premier Patrice Lumumba, Touré joined a group of activists outside the United Nations building in New York City, including Abbey Lincoln, HistoryMaker Maya Angelou, and Mae Mallory, to accuse the Belgian and U.S. governments of conspiring to kill Lumumba. He reflects upon the competing philosophies and generational differences between Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and Malcolm X. In 1965, Touré moved to Atlanta, Georgia where he was a member of SNCC's Atlanta Project. He began writing for Liberator magazine, where he worked for arts editor Larry Neal. Together, Touré and Neal were part of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). Touré gives his analysis of Malcolm X's 1965 assassination, and of the relationship between RAM, SNCC, and the Black Panther Party. He disputes civil rights activist and feminist Mary King's account of the experience of white women in SNCC.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Askia Touré recalls the Black Power movement during the 1960s. In the summer of 1964, Touré and others drafted the Black Power Position Paper in Atlanta, Georgia for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), encouraging the organization to turn from its nonviolent coalition-building roots toward a Black Power approach. He praises civil rights activists Robert Moses and Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Turé) but also explains his disagreements with them at the time. While at SNCC in Mississippi, Askia Touré attempted to stockpile arms, which Carmichael condemned as against SNCC's principles. After establishing Freedom Schools with SNCC in the Deep South, Touré joined HistoryMaker Sonia Sanchez in San Francisco State University's Black Studies Department in 1967. HistoryMaker Danny Glover was a student. Touré recounts the aftermath of Malcolm X's 1965 assassination and attempts to prevent infighting between the Nation of Islam and other Black Nationalist organizations in Harlem, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_008, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Askia Touré talks about his career since the 1970s. He relates his work with SNCC, establishing Freedom Schools to teach African American youth in the South about black history, to the Independent Black Schools Movement and other instruments of African American self-determination, such as the 1970 Congress of African People in Atlanta, Georgia and the Council for Independent Black Institutions. He reflects upon the role of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in developing the academic discipline of Black Studies. Touré taught at California's San Francisco State University with Amiri Baraka and HistoryMaker Sonia Sanchez. Touré criticizes African American leaders and intellectuals like Condoleezza Rice and HistoryMakers Colin Powell and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Touré talks about transitioning from painting to poetry, and his interest in theater. He describes his poetic works and the acceptance of the Black Arts Movement in the white academy.

Video Oral History Interview with Askia Toure', Section A2007\_131\_001\_009, TRT: 0:26:50 ?

Askia Touré reflects upon his life, art, and legacy. He remembers learning from elders like Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Queen Mother Moore, and J.A. Rogers. His only regret is that he and others had not developed strategies to successfully protect leaders like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Touré talks about U.S. Secretaries of State Condoleezza Rice and HistoryMaker Colin Powell, and praises HistoryMaker Harry Belafonte for criticizing them. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon his legacy as a poet. Touré then recites his poem "A Few Words in Passing," and describes his close relationships with fellow activists like Marvin X and HistoryMaker Sonia Sanchez. He also talks about his two sons, Tariq and Jamil.