

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jasmine Guy

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Guy, Jasmine
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy,
Dates:	December 10, 2012 and October 2, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2012 and 2016
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:06:36).
Abstract:	Actress Jasmine Guy (1964 -) is best known for her starring role as Whitley Gilbert in the popular television sitcom <i>A Different World</i> . Guy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 10, 2012 and October 2, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_244
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress and entertainer Jasmine Guy was born on March 10, 1964, in Boston, Massachusetts to William Guy and Jaye Rudolph. Her mother is a former high school teacher, and her father, the pastor of Friendship Baptist Church of Atlanta. Guy was raised in the Collier Heights neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia where she attended the former Northside Performing Arts School (now North Atlanta High School). After graduating from high school, Guy was awarded a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey Dance Center in New York. She practiced performing arts at Ailey Center for several years, which prepared her for roles in musicals and television shows.

Guy landed a starring role as Whitley Gilbert in the television show *A Different World*, a spin-off of *The Cosby Show*, which ran on TV for six years. This is her best-known role. Guy received the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Image Award every year that *A Different World* was on the air. One year after she began acting in *A Different World*, Guy was cast in her first film role in Spike Lee's *School Daze*. In 1989, Guy co-starred with Eddie Murphy and Richard Pryor in the film *Harlem Nights* and went on to have roles in numerous films, television shows, and stage productions. She released a self-titled R&B album in 1990, which reached number thirty-eight on the R&B charts.

Guy has been active in projects that promote and preserve African American history and culture, including the miniseries rendition of Alex Haley's *Queen*, the film recording of the 1930s WPA ex-slave narratives, entitled *Unchained Memories: Slave Narratives*, and the film version of activist-historian Howard Zinn's, "A People's History of the United States", entitled *The People Speak*. Guy also wrote the autobiography of Afeni Shakur, mother of hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur, entitled, "Afeni Shakur: The Evolution of a Revolutionary". Guy also won several awards for her work. From 1990 to 1995, Guy was nominated for and won six consecutive NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series.

Guy lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

Jasmine Guy was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 10, 2012 and October 2, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jasmine Guy was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 10, 2012 and October 2, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Actress Jasmine Guy (1964 -) is best known for her starring role as Whitley Gilbert in the popular television sitcom *A Different World*.

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:

Guy, Jasmine

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Guy, Jasmine --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Paramount Pictures

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 Jasmine Guy, December 10, 2012 and October 2, 2016. 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 Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_001_001, TRT: 1:30:35 ?

Jasmine Guy was born on March 10, 1964 in Boston, Massachusetts to Jeannette Resendes Guy and William Guy. Her maternal grandparents, Francisco Resendes and Maria Sousa Resendes, emigrated from the Azores islands of

Portugal to Acushnet, Massachusetts. Her grandfather became a lawyer, while her grandmother worked in the textile mills. Guy's mother grew up in Acushnet, and attended New Bedford High School in New Bedford, Massachusetts. She went on to study English at Simmons College in Boston. Guy's paternal grandparents, Nokomis Hampton Guy and Reverend Frederick Guy, Sr., lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, where her father was born. He graduated from Little Rock's Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, and then attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He went on to study at the Harvard Divinity School, and met Guy's mother in the Boston community. After marrying, they raised their family in Boston for a time, and then moved to Port Chester, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_001_002, TRT: 2:29:00 ?

Jasmine Guy spent her early childhood in Port Chester, New York, where her father was the pastor at Bethesda Baptist Church. When she was seven years old, her father joined the faculty of Morehouse College, and she moved with her family to the middle class black neighborhood of Collier Heights in Atlanta, Georgia. There, Guy attended M. Agnes Jones Elementary School, and enrolled at Sutton Middle School during the first year it was integrated. Guy was interested in performance from an early age. She enjoyed mimicking accents, and often created character monologues for her family. She began studying dance at the age of five years old, and went on to take lessons at the Atlanta Ballet. At twelve years old, she was inspired by a performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and decided to pursue a career as a professional dancer. She enrolled at the Northside School of Performing Arts, where she was active in the musical theater and dance programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_001_003, TRT: 3:28:47 ?

Jasmine Guy attended the Northside School of Performing Arts in Atlanta, Georgia, where she studied dance and acted in musical theater productions. During her freshman year, she played the role of Anita in 'West Side Story.' Guy also danced with the Atlanta Ballet, where she was told to lighten her skin with makeup for her role in the 'Nutcracker.' Because of her aspirations to become a professional performer, Guy's parents encouraged her to choose between acting and dance. She decided to focus on dance, and successfully auditioned for the training program at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) in New York City. After her high school graduation in 1979, Guy moved to New York. She was eventually promoted to the second company of AAADT, where she worked with dancers like Judith Jamison and Mary Barnett. In 1981, Guy briefly moved to Los Angeles, California to act in the television show, 'Fame.' She then returned to AAADT, where she danced in 'Revelations' and 'Cry.'

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_001_004, TRT: 4:29:54 ?

Jasmine Guy left the second company of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) in 1981, when she landed her first acting role in the television show 'Fame.' Guy returned to AAADT after one season, but eventually decided against pursuing a career as a concert dancer. She began auditioning for musical productions, and secured her early roles in the Motown revue 'Dancing in the Streets,' and the European tour of 'Bubbling Brown Sugar.' She continued to appear in musicals, including the Broadway revival of 'The Wiz.' Guy eventually decided to become a screen actor, and moved to Los Angeles, California. She obtained her first movie role in Spike Lee's 'School Daze,' which was filmed on the campus of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Through the role, Guy experienced life as a historically black college student for the first time. She drew on this experience to create the character of Whitley

Gilbert, which was her breakout role on ‘A Different World.’

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_001_005, TRT: 5:30:14 ?

Jasmine Guy landed the role of Whitley Gilbert after two unsuccessful auditions for the television show ‘A Different World.’ To create the character, she mimicked the voice and mannerisms of her former elementary school teacher, who had a strong southern accent. As a student of sketch comedy and improvisation, Guy excelled in creating memorable personalities. Her portrayal of Whitley Gilbert gained notoriety among fans of the show; and, as a result, her character was given a more prominent role, especially after the departure of actress Lisa Bonet. Guy worked closely with producer Debbie Allen, and advocated for episodes that focused on social issues like AIDS and sexual assault. In 1988, she was offered a role in Eddie Murphy’s ‘Harlem Nights,’ where she worked with stars like Richard Pryor, Della Reese and Redd Foxx. In this tape, Guy also remembers the musical numbers in ‘School Daze’ and meeting Denzel Washington on the set of ‘A Different World.’

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_002_006, TRT: 6:30:10 ?

Jasmine Guy was a cast member on ‘A Different World’ from 1987 to 1993. During that time, she learned about production, direction and writing. She wrote and directed several episodes, and was encouraged by producer Debbie Allen to pursue further writing projects. In the meantime, Guy developed an interest in the women of the Black Panther movement, and read the biographies of Elaine Brown and Kathleen Cleaver. She later met Tupac Shakur and was introduced to his mother, former Black Panther Afeni Shakur. She was one of two women in the Panther 21, a group of Panther members who were accused of bombing several New York City police stations in 1969. Guy began chronicling the life of Afeni Shakur from her childhood until her acquittal and the birth of her son in 1971. However, Guy put the project aside after Tupac Shakur’s death in 1996. She did not revisit the interviews until seven years later, when she decided to publish Afeni Shakur’s biography.

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_002_007, TRT: 7:28:37 ?

Jasmine Guy continued working as an actor while writing the biography of Afeni Shakur. She was featured on television series like ‘Melrose Place’ and ‘Touched by an Angel.’ Guy also returned to Broadway in productions of ‘Chicago’ and ‘The Feast of All Saints.’ In 1998, she married Terrence Duckett. The following year, Guy gave birth to their daughter, Imani Guy Duckett. In 2003, Guy acted in the HBO documentary ‘Unchained Memories,’ a retelling of slave narratives collected by the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s and preserved by the Library of Congress. In that same year, Guy landed a role on the Showtime series ‘Dead Like Me.’ In 2005, Guy published the biography of Afeni Shakur, ‘Afeni Shakur: Evolution of a Revolutionary.’ At this point, Guy describes her experiences of discrimination in show business, and remembers ‘School Daze’ rehearsals and her favorite performances. She also talks about the differences between stage acting and screen acting.

Video Oral History Interview with Jasmine Guy, Section A2012_244_002_008, TRT: 8:39:19 ?

Jasmine Guy served as the director of ‘I Dream,’ an opera about the life of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The production opened in 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia, and was attended by former Mayor Andrew Young and his wife Carolyn Young, as well as Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery. In 2014, Guy was featured in the movie ‘Big Stone Gap,’ which starred Whoopi Goldberg and Ashley Judd. In 2016, Guy appeared on the BET program ‘Being’ and the TV One show ‘Unsung.’ Guy also reflects upon her career as a character actor, and talks about her work as a solo musical artist. She concludes the interview by

reflecting upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community, her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.