

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruben Santiago-Hudson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Santiago-Hudson, Ruben, 1956-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson,
Dates:	August 8, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:38:54).
Abstract:	Actor and writer Ruben Santiago-Hudson (1956-) appeared in dozens of feature films, television dramas and Broadway plays. He wrote 2001's <i>Lackawanna Blues</i> , an autobiographical play that he adapted to film in 2005, premiering on HBO. Santiago-Hudson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 8, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_005
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor and writer Ruben Santiago-Hudson was born on November 24, 1956 in Lackawanna, New York to Alean Hudson and Ruben Santiago. He graduated from Lackawanna High School; and earned his B.A. degree in theatre from Binghamton University in 1978, and his M.F.A. degree from Wayne State University in 1982.

Santiago-Hudson first appeared in the 1988 film, *Coming to America*. He then played Captain Billy Cooper on the daytime drama *Another World* from 1990 to 1993. Santiago-Hudson made his Broadway debut as Buddy Bolden in *Jelly's Last*

Jam in 1992, and starred in August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* in 1995. He wrote the autobiographical play *Lackawanna Blues* in 2001, and adapted it into the award-winning 2005 HBO film of the same name. He co-starred opposite Phylicia Rashad in *Gem of the Ocean* on Broadway in 2004; and, in 2007, he starred in a PBS Nova documentary about the life of Percy Lavon Julian. From 2009 to 2011, he played Captain Roy Montgomery in ABC's *Castle*. Santiago-Hudson returned to Broadway to star in *Stick Fly* in 2011, and directed August Wilson's *JITNEY!* on Broadway in 2017.

Santiago-Hudson's other film credits include *Bleeding Hearts*, *Blown Away*, *Domestic Disturbance*, *Which Way Home*, *The Devil's Advocate*, *American Gangster*, *Mr. Brooks*, *Shaft*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Showtime's *Solomon and Sheba*. He also made appearance on the television shows *The Cosby Mysteries*, *New York Undercover*, *NYPD Blue*, *Touched by an Angel*, *The West Wing*, *Third Watch*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, Showtime's *Billions*, the TNT series *Public Morals*, and five episodes of *Law & Order*. Santiago-Hudson received the 1996 Tony Award for Best Featured Performer in *Seven Guitars*, and was awarded the 2006 Humanitas Prize in writing for the HBO film adaptation of his play *Lackawanna Blues*, and the 2009 NAACP Lifetime Achievement Theatre Award. In 2013, Santiago-Hudson won the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Director, an Obie Award for Direction, and was nominated for the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Director of a Play for the Off-Broadway production of *The Piano Lesson*. In 2016, he won an Obie Award for Special Citations: Collaboration of the play *Skeleton Crew*. He also received an honorary doctorate of letters from Buffalo State College in 2006, and Wayne State University in 2015. In 2014, The Ruben Santiago-Hudson Fine Arts Learning Center was named in his honor in his hometown of Lackawanna, New York.

Santiago-Hudson and his wife, Jeannie Brittan, have two children: Trey and Lily, in addition to his two older sons: Broderick and Ruben III.

Ruben Santiago-Hudson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 8, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson was conducted by Harriette Cole on August 8, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Actor and writer Ruben Santiago-Hudson (1956-) appeared in dozens of feature films, television dramas and Broadway

plays. He wrote 2001's *Lackawanna Blues*, an autobiographical play that he adapted to film in 2005, premiering on HBO.

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:

Santiago-Hudson, Ruben, 1956-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Santiago-Hudson, Ruben, 1956---Interviews

African American actors--Interviews.

African American screenwriters--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

Screenwriter

Stage Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|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 Ruben Santiago-Hudson, August 8, 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 2/5/2020 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 Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_001, TRT: 1:29:16 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson was born on November 24, 1956 in Lackawanna, New York to Alean Hudson and Ruben Santiago. His mother was born in McKenzie, Alabama to sharecroppers A.G. Hudson and Jessie Hudson. His father, a railroad worker, was born to Matilde Santiago in Penuelas, Puerto Rico; and met Santiago-Hudson's mother after moving to Lackawanna. Due to Santiago-Hudson's mother's drug addiction, he was raised by Rachel Crosby, who owned the rooming house where his parents lived; and his two older brothers, Chauncey and Lonnie, were raised by his maternal grandmother. When he was in the first through fifth grades, Santiago-Hudson lived with his

mother and brothers in Buffalo, New York. He eventually returned to Crosby's home, which was located in a racially mixed neighborhood in Lackawanna. Santiago-Hudson recalls staying with his mother's relatives in Pennsylvania each summer, and visiting his paternal family in Puerto Rico at the age of three years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_002, TRT: 2:31:49 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson grew up in a rooming house owned by his surrogate mother, Rachel Crosby, in Lackawanna, New York. Many of the tenants were steel workers and veterans; and, on one occasion, Santiago-Hudson's elementary school teacher reported his living arrangements to social services. They threatened to remove Santiago-Hudson from Crosby's care, until she proved that she was providing him with a stable home. Her husband, mechanic Bill Crosby, taught Santiago-Hudson to repair cars; and he was encouraged to excel in school by his godparents, Mattie Overton and Adolph Overton, the latter of whom was the first black councilman in the City of Lackawanna. As a teenager, Santiago-Hudson was bused to Lackawanna High School, where the integration process led to race riots. During this time, he read 'Black Fire' by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal, and adopted militant ideologies. He was also tutored by Peace Corps volunteer Robert Ambrogi, who encouraged him to attend the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_003, TRT: 3:29:04 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson's sons, Broderick Santiago and Ruben Santiago III, were born while he was in high school. After graduating, he enrolled at the State University of New York at Binghamton, where he was mentored by playwright Loften Mitchell, choreographer Percival Borde and administrator Don Boros. Santiago-Hudson had difficulty adjusting to the college setting, and was suspended for a semester because of his poor grades. He appealed to the Educational Opportunity Program for assistance; and returned to Lackawanna, New York, where he attended Buffalo State College. His grades improved, and he returned to the State University of New York at

Binghamton, where he acted in the play 'Sizwe Banzi is Dead.' He also performed in productions at the Cider Mill Playhouse in Endicott, New York. After earning a bachelor's degree, he matriculated at Wayne State University, and acted in 'Native Son' under the direction of Von Washington at the Bonstelle Theatre in Detroit, Michigan.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_004, TRT: 4:31:38 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson helped found the Afro-American Studio Theatre while enrolled in a master's degree program at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He did not receive his degree until 1996, due to a teacher who discriminated against him. In 1983, Santiago-Hudson left Detroit to direct a production of 'Home' in New York City; but, upon arrival, learned that Samm-Art Williams had replaced him. Santiago-Hudson had difficulty finding work as an actor, until obtaining roles in Charles Fuller's 'A Soldier's Play' and Lonne Elder III's 'Ceremonies in Dark Old Men.' He secured a position with The Negro Ensemble Company after adopting the surname Hudson, and acting on the soap opera 'Another World' alongside actors Joe Morton and Howard Rollins. In the early 1990s, Santiago-Hudson met playwright August Wilson and director Lloyd Richards while auditioning for Wilson's 'Two Trains Running.' Although he lost that role to Laurence Fishburne, Wilson remembered his audition, and cast him in 'Seven Guitars.'

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_005, TRT: 5:33:50 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson met theater professionals Samuel L. Jackson, James Pickens, Jr., Suzan-Lori Parks and Ntozake Shange while acting in New York City. Santiago-Hudson also worked in Los Angeles, California, where he acted alongside Obba Babatunde in George C. Wolfe's 'Jelly's Last Jam.' When the play moved to Broadway, Santiago-Hudson reprised his role alongside dancer Gregory Hines; and later acted in Hines' films, 'The Red Sneakers' and 'Bleeding Hearts.' Santiago-Hudson also appeared in 'American Gangster' with Denzel Washington, and 'Domestic Disturbance' with John

Travolta. He directed August Wilson's 'Gem of the Ocean' at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey and the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, California; and starred opposite Halle Berry in the TV movie adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's novel, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God.' Additionally, Santiago-Hudson was married to Jeannie Brittan, with whom he had twins, Lily Santiago-Hudson and Trey Santiago-Hudson.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_006, TRT: 6:28:26 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson was encouraged by playwright George C. Wolfe to write the one man stage play, 'Lackawanna Blues,' which was based upon his childhood in Lackawanna, New York. In the late 1990s, he was commissioned by The Public Theater in New York City to complete the script. Blues musician Bill Sims, Jr. composed the music, and Santiago-Hudson acted as the play's twenty-six characters under the direction of Loretta Greco. When The Public Theater closed for renovations, the production moved to the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, New Jersey. 'Lackawanna Blues' repeatedly sold out, and Santiago-Hudson decided to showcase it in multiple cities. He also performed it at Halle Berry's Oscar party, which was attended by actresses Whoopi Goldberg and Angela Bassett. The film adaptation was directed by Wolfe and starred S. Epatha Merkerson; and received critical acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival. Santiago-Hudson reflects upon the legacy of his surrogate mother, Rachel Crosby, who raised him in Lackawanna.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_007, TRT: 7:32:28 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson's mentor, August Wilson, passed away in 2005. To honor his memory, Santiago-Hudson starred in Wilson's one man play, 'How I Learned What I Learned,' in 2013; and directed Wilson's 'The Piano Lesson,' starring Brandon J. Dirden, in 2015. At the time of the interview, Santiago-Hudson planned to direct Wilson's 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' at the Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey; and Wilson's 'Jitney' in its first production on a Broadway stage. He recalls securing the rights to 'Jitney,' and recruiting veteran stage

actors Anthony Chisholm, Stephen McKinley Henderson and Raymond Anthony Thomas for roles in the production. In addition, Santiago-Hudson reflects upon Wilson's legacy, and describes the importance of accurately producing Wilson's plays, including 'Joe Turner's Come and Gone' and 'Gem of the Ocean.' He also talks about the successful interpretations of Wilson's characters by actors James Earl Jones, Delroy Lindo and Charles S. Dutton.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_008, TRT: 8:36:02 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson directed 'The Piano Lesson' by August Wilson in 2013, on the Irene Diamond Stage at New York City's Signature Theatre. He had a longstanding professional relationship with the theater's founder, James Houghton, who often assisted Santiago-Hudson in securing funds and venues for his productions. Santiago-Hudson's production of 'The Piano Lesson' starred Brandon J. Dirden; and opened to critical acclaim, winning multiple Lucille Lortel Awards, Off-Broadway Theater Awards and AUDELCO Awards. In 2014, Santiago-Hudson's play 'Your Blues Ain't Sweet Like Mine' premiered at the Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey. It was then acquired by the theater department at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, Pennsylvania. Santiago-Hudson describes his advice for young actors, and his TED talk on integrity. He also remembers his mentors, including dancer Gregory Hines, director Lloyd Richards and playwright August Wilson; and reflects upon his life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Section A2016_005_001_009, TRT: 9:26:21 2016/08/08

Ruben Santiago-Hudson describes the new forms of racism that arose following the election of President Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States, in 2008. He also talks about his mother, Alean Hudson, who overcame her drug addiction to help young girls in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; as well as his father, Ruben Santiago, and his Puerto Rican heritage. Santiago-Hudson reflects upon his acting career, and describes his plans for the future;

which, at the time of the interview, included starring opposite Anika Noni Rose and Jasmine Guy on the BET television show 'The Quad.'