

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Stepto

PERSON

Stepto, Robert B.

Alternative Names: Robert Stepto;

Life Dates: October 28, 1945-

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Residence: Woodbridge, Connecticut

Work: New Haven, Connecticut

Occupations: Professor

Biographical Note

Professor Robert Stepto was born October 28, 1945 in Chicago, Illinois to Dr. Robert and Anna Stepto. He attended the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, graduating in 1962. He then attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, where he earned his B.A. degree in English in 1966. Stepto went on to attend Stanford University, where he received his M.A. degree in English literature in 1968, and his Ph.D. degree in English and American literature in 1974.

From 1971 to 1974, Stepto was an assistant professor of English and American civilization at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He was hired by Yale University in 1974 as an assistant professor of English, American studies, and African American studies. Stepto served as the first director of graduate studies in the African American studies department from 1978 until 1981. In 1984, he became a tenured professor in the English, American studies, and African American studies departments. His focus areas were American and African American autobiography, fiction, poetry and visual arts since 1840. Stepto also began teaching summer classes at Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College in Ripton, Vermont in 1990. He released his first book, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* in 1979. In 1998, he published his memoir, *Blue as the Lake: A Personal Geography*. From 2005 to 2008, Stepto chaired the African American studies department at Yale University. He later published a series of essays in 2010 that analyze works ranging from Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois and Toni Morrison, which he titled *A Home Elsewhere: Reading African American Classics in the Age of Obama*. Stepto retired from Yale University after forty-five years.

Over the years, Stepto received numerous awards for his writings, which included: Notable American Essay of 2001 and Pushcart Prize nomination for "Greyhound Kind of Mood," published by the New England Review; Notable American Essay of 1997 for "Hyde Park," published by Callaloo; Notable American Essay of 1996 for "Black Piano," published by Callaloo; and Notable American Essay of 1995 for "Woodlawn," published by the New England Review. Other awards included the Bread Loaf School of English's Frank and Eleanor Griffiths Chair Professor of English in 2007 and 2017, as well as its Robert Frost Chair Professor of English in 1995. In 2018, Yale University named Stepto its John M. Schiff Professor of English. Trinity College also presented Stepto with its 175th Anniversary Alumni Award in 1999, and the Alumni Medal for Excellence in 1986.

Stepto resides in Connecticut with his wife, Michele L. Stepto. They had two children: Rafael Stepto and the late Gabriel Stepto.

Robert Stepto was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 24, 2019.

Related Entries

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Trinity College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Stanford University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.A.

Stanford University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

Yale University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1974 to 1984]

Assistant Professor; English and African American Studies

Yale University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1988 to ?]

Professor; English and African American Studies

Williams College [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1987 to ?]

Assistant Professor; English and American Civilization

Callaloo [MEMBEROF]
[from 1989 to 2010]

Contributing Editor

University of Chicago Press [MEMBEROF]
[from 2003 to ?]

Member; Visions and Revisions Editorial Board

Cambridge University Press Studies in American Literature and Culture [MEMBEROF]
[from 1990 to 1998]

Board Member

National Advisory Council for the American Writers Museum Project [MEMBEROF]
[from 2010 to ?]

Advisory Board Member

Callaloo [MEMBEROF]
[from 1984 to 1988]

Associate Editor

American Quarterly [MEMBEROF]
[from 1991 to 1994]

Board Member

American Literature [MEMBEROF]
[from 1987 to 1988]

Board Member