

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Spencer Crew

PERSON

Crew, Spencer R., 1949-

Alternative Names: Spencer Crew;

Life Dates: January 7, 1949-

Place of Birth: Woodmere Village, Ohio, USA

Residence: Reston, Virginia

Work: Fairfax, Virginia

Occupations: Museum Director; Historian

Biographical Note

Museum director and historian Spencer R. Crew was born on January 7, 1949 in Woodmere Village, Ohio to R. Spencer and Ada Lee Scott Crew. Crew received his B.A. degree in history in 1971 from Brown University and his M.A. degree in history in 1973 and his Ph.D. in history in 1979, both from Rutgers University.

From 1978 to 1981, Crew was an assistant professor of African American and American history at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County in Catonsville, Maryland while pursuing his Ph.D. degree. In 1981, Crew began working as a historian at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History (NMAH). In 1987, he became a curator of the NMAH's division of community life and curated his first exhibit titled *Field to Factory: African-American Migration, 1915-1940*. At the same time, he also worked as a consultant for the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee and the Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. From 1991 to 1992, Crew served as the NMAH's deputy director and in 1992, he was named acting director of the NMAH until 1994 when he was made director of NMAH. In 2001, he left the NMAH to become executive director and president of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he stayed for six years. In 2008, Crew joined George Mason University as a Robinson professor in the history and art history departments. He was then appointed interim director of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in 2019.

Crew has been a member of the Organization of American Historians and has sat on the boards of the American Association of Museums and the National Council for History Education as chair. At Brown University, he served as trustee, president-elect of the

Alumni Association, and on the Advisory Council on Diversity. Crew also served as an editorial board member of the Journal of American History.

Crew has won numerous awards for his work, including the Osceola Award in 1988 from Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the Robert A. Brooks Award in 1994, and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History Service Award in 1994. Crew was also inducted into the Hall of Distinguished Alumni at Rutgers University in 2003 and received the McMickmen College Distinguished Leadership Award from the University of Cincinnati in 2004.

Spencer and his wife, Sandra Lorraine Prioleau, live in Washington D.C. They have two children, Alika and Adom.

Spencer R. Crew was interviewed by The History Makers on January 23, 2020.

Related Entries

Brown University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Rutgers University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

M.A.

Rutgers University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

University of Maryland-Baltimore County [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1978 to 1981]

Assistant professor

National Museum of American History [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1981 to 2001]

Historian, Director

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2001 to 2019]

Executive Director

George Mason University [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2008 to ?]

Professor

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2019 to 2020]

Interim Director

American Association of Museums [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Board

American Historical Association [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Newsletter co-editor

Brown University [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Trustee

National Council for History Education [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Chair

Organization of American Historians [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

Journal of American History [MEMBEROF]

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