

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nikki Giovanni

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Giovanni, Nikki
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nikki Giovanni,
Dates:	January 31, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:32:00).
Abstract:	Poet Nikki Giovanni (1943 -) was the author of fourteen volumes of poetry and several books. She also taught writing, poetry and literature in the English department at Virginia Polytechnical Institute. Giovanni was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_027
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Award-winning poet, author, and civil rights activist, Nikki Giovanni, was born Yolande Cornelia Giovanni, Jr., on June 7, 1943, in Knoxville, Tennessee, and was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio.

A poet and spoken word artist, Giovanni entered Fisk University in 1960, where she edited the school's literary magazine and became involved in both the Writer's Workshop and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; she received her B.A. degree in 1967. Giovanni became active in the Black Arts Movement, organizing the Black Arts Festival in Cincinnati; during this period of her life, she developed strong and enduring friendships with fellow writers James Baldwin and Sonia Sanchez. Radicalized by the assassination of Malcolm X and the rise of the Black Panthers, Giovanni's poetry in the 1960s and 1970s became the voice of many African Americans. Later, Giovanni applied for and was accepted into the graduate program of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Work; she also went on to study at Columbia University's School of Fine Arts.

In 1970, Giovanni founded her own publishing company, Niktom Limited. Throughout her career, Giovanni published more than fourteen volumes of poetry, including: *Black Feeling Black Talk*, *Black Judgement*, *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day*, *My House*, *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni* and *Love Poems*. She has also written and published books, including *Racism 101* and *Blues: For All the Changes*. In 1987, Giovanni began working as a professor in the English department of Virginia Polytechnical Institute; there she taught writing, poetry, and literature, and was eventually named a distinguished professor.

Giovanni received many honors and awards for her work, including numerous honorary degrees; the NAACP Image Award for Literature in 1998 and 2000; and the Langston Hughes Award for Distinguished Contributions to Arts and Letters in 1996. Giovanni was also named Woman of the Year by several magazines, including *Mademoiselle*, *Essence* and *Ladies Home Journal*. In 2008, Giovanni was commissioned by National Public Radio's program, *All Things Considered*, to pen an inaugural poem for President Barack Obama. A popular guest

speaker, Giovanni was invited to read poetry at the Lincoln Memorial for the bicentennial celebration of Lincoln's birth in 2009.

Nikki Giovanni was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 31, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nikki Giovanni was conducted by Adele Hodge on January 31, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet Nikki Giovanni (1943 -) was the author of fourteen volumes of poetry and several books. She also taught writing, poetry and literature in the English department at Virginia Polytechnical Institute.

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:

Giovanni, Nikki

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Giovanni, Nikki--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Poet

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Nikki Giovanni, January 31, 2003. 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 Nikki Giovanni, Section A2003_027_001_001, TRT: 0:31:14 ?
Nikki Giovanni gives the meaning behind her name and talks about why she is called 'Nikki'. She then discusses her family's history and describes where the

name Giovanni may have come from. She discusses some of her recent editing projects and then remembers her relationship to her maternal grandparents. Giovanni then describes her elderly cousin as well as how her relationship with her mother has developed over the years. She talks about her role as a niece in looking out for other family members in caring for their well-being as they grow older.

Video Oral History Interview with Nikki Giovanni, Section A2003_027_001_002, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

Nikki Giovanni discusses her relationship as a niece to her Aunt Ann. She then briefly talks about her parents and tells of a trip she took with her mother as well as her father's influence on her. Giovanni remembers teachers from her early days and details a situation that arose where she was wrongly punished. Then, she describes her continued relationships with certain teachers. Giovanni discusses her influences as a poet, citing examples of how experiences from her youth became subject matter. She briefly talks about her philosophy on writing. Giovanni evaluates several black public figures and shares some of her political views. Next, she describes her adolescent life as she details various relationships. She talks in depth about the process involved in choosing a college as well as the reasons for deciding upon Fisk University. Nikki Giovanni recalls an early episode in her years at Fisk.

Video Oral History Interview with Nikki Giovanni, Section A2003_027_001_003, TRT: 0:31:17 ?

Nikki Giovanni recalls participating in the Nashville sit-ins while attending Fisk University. Then she describes conflicts she had with administration there which led to her taking a leave from the University. Giovanni tells of her decision to return to Fisk. Briefly, she discusses influential classmates at Fisk. Next, she describes her earliest publications and then speaks on her decision to study social work. Giovanni then explains what led her away from social work to Columbia University. She then describes how she secured her book party for 'Black Judgment' and talks about the outcome of that event. Giovanni discusses the gangster figure in the past and present. She then talks about being a mother and her relationship with her son.

Video Oral History Interview with Nikki Giovanni, Section A2003_027_001_004, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Nikki Giovanni discusses her son Thomas's educational decisions and tells some important life lessons he learned along the way. She then expresses hopeful interest in becoming a grandmother. Giovanni discusses more details on her relationship with her son. Next, she gives her opinion on being an unwed mother. She considers the issues that children of public figures face and cites specific examples. Giovanni then talks about her relationship with Queen Latifah. She talks about some of her own career highlights and then considers her commercial success.

Video Oral History Interview with Nikki Giovanni, Section A2003_027_001_005, TRT: 0:27:21 ?

Nikki Giovanni shares some provocative and controversial opinions on everything from Tupac to Timbuktu. She describes her respect for hip-hop music and discusses the possibility of winning a Grammy for her album liner notes work. Giovanni then gives her opinion on popular music and how these genres are usually viewed by older generations. Next, she considers how she would like to be remembered. Nikki Giovanni reflects on human existence and shares her reflections on life. She discusses the richness of the oral tradition.