

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Shari Carpenter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Carpenter, Shari, 1961-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Shari Carpenter,
Dates:	January 31, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:09).
Abstract:	Filmmaker Shari Carpenter (1961 -) was one of the first African American script supervisors to join the film union Local 161. Carpenter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_037
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Filmmaker Shari Carpenter was born on July 14, 1961 in Washington, D.C. She is one of the first African American script supervisors to join the film union Local 161. Her mother, Vivian Carpenter, was a homemaker and her father, Horace Carpenter, was an aspiring artist. As a child, Carpenter was a natural storyteller and wrote several short stories. The 1970s blaxploitation era films also inspired her. She received her diploma from McKinley High School in 1979 and her B.F.A. degree from New York University in 1984.

Carpenter's career began in 1990 when she became the script supervisor on Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*. She has worked on most of his films since then including *Malcolm X* in 1992 and *Inside Man* in 2005. As a filmmaker she has written and directed several short films including *The Assistant* and *Since Lisa*, which won several awards including Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame and the Black American Cinema Society Awards. Her films were selected to appear on BET Jazz's *The Best Shorts*. Carpenter's debut feature film, *Kali's Vibe*, won the Jury Award and the Audience Award for Best Feature in 2002 at the Denver Pan African Film Festival. It was also nominated for the first annual Gordon Parks Award and won the Martha's Flavor Fest Screenplay Competition.

Carpenter has received grants from the Eastman Fund as well as the New York State Council for the Arts. She has appeared as a panelist on the Black Filmmakers in the Director's Chair Africana.com Roundtable. She also teaches several seminars on directing actors, screenwriting and script supervision. In 2004, she won the Oregon Writers Colony fiction award for her short story, *Ashes*. Carpenter currently resides in Brooklyn, New York.

Shari Carpenter was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 31, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Shari Carpenter was conducted by Shawn Wilson on January 31, 2007, in New

York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Filmmaker Shari Carpenter (1961 -) was one of the first African American script supervisors to join the film union Local 161.

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:

- Carpenter, Shari, 1961-
- Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)
- Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
 - Carpenter, Shari, 1961- --Interviews
-

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews.

Organizations:

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
 - The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
-

Occupations:

Filmmaker

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 Shari Carpenter, January 31, 2007. 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 Shari Carpenter, Section A2007_037_001_001, TRT: 0:29:38 ?
Shari Carpenter was born on July 14, 1961 in Washington, D.C. to Vivian Tyler Carpenter and Horace Carpenter. Her mother was born in Suffolk, Virginia, and attended boarding school in Washington, D.C. Both Carpenter’s maternal and paternal grandparents died when her parents were young, and they were raised by their aunts instead. Her mother was raised by two of Carpenter’s maternal great aunts, who were both professionals and landowners; while her father was raised by Carpenter’s paternal great aunt in Virginia and New York City. Her father was an artist, and drafted U.S. government documents. He became involved with the Nation of Islam through the writings of Elijah Muhammad,

although he never became a Muslim. Carpenter describes the influence of her parents, including how her mother imparted her love of writing, and how her father inspired her to wear natural hair in the 1960s. Carpenter's family attended the racially integrated St. Stephen and the Incarnation Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

African American school children--Washington (D.C.).

Racism--United States--Washington (D.C.)

African Americans--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Shari Carpenter, Section A2007_037_001_002, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

Shari Carpenter grew up surrounded by African American professionals in her neighborhood of Washington D.C., where she enjoyed seeing movies like 'Cornbread, Earl and Me,' and listening to The Jackson 5. Her neighborhood was segregated, and she had no close relationships to white people until meeting her fifth grade teacher, Kathy O'Rourke. Carpenter attended Washington, D.C.'s Jessie LaSalle Elementary School and Bertie Backus Junior High School, where she helped mount a play. At that time, Carpenter aspired to become a poet like her role model, Nikki Giovanni. She composed poetry on her own, as her school lacked a creative writing program. Carpenter's family lived briefly in Duncanville, Texas for her father's career, and she attended a performing arts high school there. Upon her return to Washington, D.C., Carpenter enrolled at McKinley Technical High School, and studied writing after school at the Lemuel A. Penn Center. After graduating, she went on to pursue acting at New York University.

African American fathers.

Racism--African American children.

Interracial friendship--Washington (D.C.).

New York University--Students.

African American college students--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Shari Carpenter, Section A2007_037_001_003, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Shari Carpenter majored in drama at New York University in New York City, although she was more interested in writing. Her classmates at New York University included actor John Leguizamo and filmmaker Spike Lee. At that time, the theater program did not mount plays about African Americans, aside from one production about a plantation. The black students were offered roles as slaves, and Carpenter refused to participate. She graduated in 1984, and was hired as an administrative assistant at the publishing company John Wiley and Sons, Inc. In 1986, Carpenter saw Spike Lee's film, 'She's Gotta Have It,' and sought a job with him. Lee hired Carpenter to work on several music videos, and she secured positions as an intern on the set of 'Do The Right Thing,' and an assistant script supervisor for 'Mo' Better Blues.' During this time, Carpenter also studied film at The New School for Social Research, and created her first short film, 'Too Much Stuff,' about her sister, fashion designer Patti Carpenter.

New York University--Students.

New York (City). Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center--African American students.

Lee, Spike.

She's gotta have it (Motion picture).

Video recording--production and direction.

Video Oral History Interview with Shari Carpenter, Section A2007_037_001_004, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Shari Carpenter was groomed to become Spike Lee's new script supervisor while assisting the script supervisor for 'Mo' Better Blues.' During this time, Carpenter became one of the first African American women to join the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians. She also studied film at The New School for Social Research in New York City, and created her second short film, 'Since Lisa.' A success at the Hollywood Black Film Festival, 'Since Lisa' was influenced by directors Ayoka Chenzira and Julie Dash. To fund the film, Carpenter saved half of every paycheck from her work as the script supervisor for Lee's 'Jungle Fever' and 'Malcolm X.' Carpenter created her third short film, 'Kali's Vibe,' in 1999. She reflects upon the portrayal of African Americans in film at the time, and how she found it difficult to work on crime dramas like Forest Whitaker's 'Strapped' and Mario Van Peebles' 'New Jack City,' as the films portrayed experiences unlike the lives of the directors.

Mo' better blues (Motion picture)--Employee.

Trade union--New York--Film.

African Americans in motion pictures.

New Jack City (Motion picture).

Video Oral History Interview with Shari Carpenter, Section A2007_037_001_005, TRT: 0:24:22 ?

Shari Carpenter worked on Tim Hunter's 'The Saint of Fort Washington,' her first major film outside of Spike Lee's company, in 1992. As a new director, Hunter asked her many questions, and Carpenter learned a great deal about her role as a script supervisor. Carpenter was involved with the ABC Writers Development Program, and received a fellowship through the Independent Filmmaker Project in 2001. Through the project, she met director Jim McKay and producer Sarah Green, who became her mentors. She was particularly influenced by McKay's style in his film, 'Girls Town.' Spike Lee also mentored Carpenter, who continued to work as his script supervisor on films like 'Inside Man.' Carpenter talks about directors like Cheryl Dunye and Kasi Lemmons, and the opportunities afforded to black women in the film industry. She also reflects upon her life and family; her hopes for the African American film community; and how she would like to be remembered.

African American women directors--New York (State)--New York.

Motion picture industry--Racism.

Motion pictures--Distribution.

African Americans in motion pictures.