

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jackee Harry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harry, Jackée, 1956-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jackee Harry,
Dates:	November 6, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:27).
Abstract:	Actress Jackee Harry (1956 -) was best known for her role as Sandra Clark on the sitcom, "227," for which she became the first African American woman to win an Emmy Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series. Harry's other television credits included "The Women of Brewster Place," "Amen," and "Sister, Sister." Harry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 6, 2007, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_323
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress Jackée Harry was born Jacqueline Yvonnee Harry on August 14, 1956 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but was raised in Harlem, New York, by her mother Flossie Harry. At the age of fourteen, Harry landed the lead role of the “King” in her school’s production of *The King and I*. After graduating from New York City’s High School of Music and Art, Harry attended the University of Long Island in Brooklyn, New York, where she earned her B.A. degree in education.

Harry began her career as a history teacher at Brooklyn Technical High School. After two years of teaching, she departed from her profession and pursued a career in acting. Harry received acting lessons at the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side in New York City and made her acting debut in 1973, with a small part in a play written by Richard Wesley. She then starred in *A Broadway Musical* as a chorus girl. In 1983, Harry made her television debut by acting opposite the then-unknown Morgan Freeman in the daytime soap opera, *Another World*.

In 1985, Harry found her signature role, starring as “Sandra Clark” on the NBC sitcom *227*. As the breakout star of the show, she became the first African American to win an Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series. Her performance on *227* inspired NBC producers to create a television pilot for her entitled *Jackée*. After leaving the cast of *227* in 1989, Harry starred opposite Oprah Winfrey in the adaptation of Gloria Naylor’s novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*. In 1991, Harry was a part of an all-star cast that included Redd Foxx and Della Reese when she played the role of “Ruth ‘CoCo’ Royal” in *The Royal Family*. From 1994 to 1999, Harry starred as the adoptive mother of Tia and Tamera Mowry’s characters in the ABC sitcom, *Sister, Sister* and won NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series for two consecutive years in 1999 and 2000.

In 1994, Harry made her return to the theater by starring as “Billie Holiday” in the play *Lady Day at Emersons Bar*

and Grill. Following that stage production, she fulfilled the role of “madam who runs a bordello” in the Broadway Musical *The Boys From Syracuse*, a play based on William Shakespeare’s classic *The Comedy of Errors*. Harry appeared on the second season of VH1’s *Celebrity Fit Club* in 2005, where she lost a total of thirty-nine pounds over 100 days. Her achievement marked one of the top weight losses in the history of the show. Harry’s other television credits include guest appearances on *Amen*, *Designing Women*, *Dave’s World*, *Hollywood Squares*, *7th Heaven*, *That’s So Raven* and *Everybody Hates Chris*.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jackee Harry was conducted by Jacques Lesure on November 6, 2007, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actress Jackee Harry (1956 -) was best known for her role as Sandra Clark on the sitcom, "227," for which she became the first African American woman to win an Emmy Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series. Harry's other television credits included "The Women of Brewster Place," "Amen," and "Sister, Sister."

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:

Harry, Jackée, 1956-

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Harry, Jackée, 1956- --Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

African American television personalities--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actress

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Jackee Harry, November 6, 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 Jackee Harry, Section A2007_323_001_001, TRT: 0:28:35 ?

Jackee Harry was born on August 14, 1956 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Flossie Mack and Warren Perry. In Winston-Salem, Harry's paternal grandfather, Arthur Perry, married Ester Perry, a white woman, with whom he raised fourteen children, including Harry's father. Her maternal grandparents, Lucille Walters and Jack Mack, were from Barnwell, South Carolina, where Harry lived after her father died from alcoholism, as her mother could not support five children on her salary as a nurse aide. At nine years old, Harry returned to her family, who had moved to the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. Harry was an excellent student, and skipped several grades while attending the Riverdale Girls School in the Bronx, New York. The school was far from Harlem, so Harry lived with a Jewish family during the week, and returned home on the weekends. Harry went on to attend Junior High School 136, where she performed in 'Oklahoma,' and played the lead role in 'The King and I.'

African American actresses--Interviews.

African American television personalities--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Jackee Harry, Section A2007_323_001_002, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

Jackee Harry successfully auditioned to study opera at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City. Her best friends, Valjean Dean and Norvalla Nelson, were also admitted, although Nelson moved away from New York City before matriculating. During high school, Harry was socially isolated, as she had few African American peers, and no longer associated with Dean, who had become a poor influence. Instead, Harry spent time with her boyfriend, Manny Cabrera, whom she met in the tenth grade. Cabrera introduced Harry to the Civil Rights Movement in New York City, and encouraged her to become involved. While in school, Harry worked for Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, and participated in acting workshops and performances at the Henry Street Settlement, where Woodie King, Jr. was the resident director. Upon graduation, she studied teaching at Long Island University, and acted in productions at the nearby Kumble Theater in Brooklyn, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Jackee Harry, Section A2007_323_001_003, TRT: 0:28:52 ?

Jackee Harry taught history at the Brooklyn Technical High School in Brooklyn, New York, while also performing at the Henry Street Settlement in New York City. After two years, Harry began to receive small professional acting roles, and left her teaching position. In addition to performing, she worked on the Broadway production of 'The Wiz' as a dresser for Stephanie Mills, Andre De Shields and Mabel King. Harry travelled with the show's national tour to Los Angeles, California, where she auditioned to understudy the role of Glinda. She was rejected because she was a dresser, so she quit her job to pursue acting full time. Upon returning to New York City, Harry was offered a chorus role in 'A Broadway Musical' by the director, George W. Faison. During rehearsals, she was moved to the principal role of Melinda Bernard, and further roles on Broadway shows like 'Eubie!' followed. Around this time, Harry met and married her first husband, bass guitarist Jerry Jemmott.

Video Oral History Interview with Jackee Harry, Section A2007_323_001_004, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

Jackee Harry acted in a production of Toni Morrison's 'New Orleans' alongside Charlayne Woodard and Ann Duquesnay. While she worked on the play, her husband, bass guitarist Jerry Jemmott, was touring overseas. Harry was about to join him in Africa, when she was offered a day player role on the soap opera 'Another World,' which led her to a three-year contracted role on the show. Harry starred as Lilly Mason alongside Morgan Freeman, Joe Morton and Michele Shay; and, during this time, divorced her husband. She then starred in Robin Williams' film, 'Moscow on the Hudson,' and was offered the role of Sandra Clark on the sitcom '227' alongside Marla Gibbs. The role was originally intended to be recurring; but, after seeing Harry's performance, the producers made Clark a regular character. In the late 1980s, Harry starred in 'Amen'; Oprah Winfrey's miniseries, 'The Women of Brewster Place'; and 'The Royal Family' with Della Reese-Lett and Redd Foxx.

Video Oral History Interview with Jackee Harry, Section A2007_323_001_005, TRT: 0:21:48 ?

Jackee Harry was on the set of 'The Royal Family' when its lead actor, Redd Foxx, died of a heart attack in 1991. The show ended shortly afterwards, and Harry moved on to star as the wife of Tim Reid in 'Sister, Sister,' which featured Tamera Mowry-Housley and Tia Mowry-Hardtrick in the title roles. After 'Sister, Sister' ended in 1999, Harry made several guest appearances on 'Designing Women' and 'That's So Raven.' She also appeared on the reality show 'Celebrity Fit Club,' where she lost thirty-nine pounds. At the time of the interview, she had a starring role in Jason Alexander's off-Broadway revival of 'Damn Yankees' with Armelia McQueen, Ken Page and Cleavant Derricks. Harry shares her advice to aspiring actors, and her hopes for African American women in the film and television industries. She remembers her acting mentors, including Della Reese-Lett and Diahann Carroll, and reflects upon her life, legacy and the importance of history.