

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Susan Fales-Hill

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Fales-Hill, Susan, 1962-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 13, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:26:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Television producer Susan Fales-Hill (1962 - ) was a writer on the <i>Cosby Show</i> and <i>A Different World</i> ; executive producer of <i>Can't Hurry Love</i> and <i>Kirk</i> ; and co-creator of the Showtime original series <i>Linc's</i> . She also authored three books: <i>Always Wear Joy: My Mother Bold and Beautiful</i> , <i>One Flight Up</i> and <i>Imperfect Bliss</i> . Fales-Hill was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 13, 2013, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_321
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author, television writer and producer Susan Fales-Hill was born on August 15, 1962 in Rome, Italy to Timothy Fales and Haitian-American actress, Josephine Premice. Fales-Hill was raised in New York City, and graduated from the Lycee Francais de New York in 1980. In 1985, she graduated with her B.A. degree in history and literature from Harvard University.

Upon graduation, Fales-Hill began an apprenticeship as a writer on *The Cosby Show*. In 1987, she transferred to the show's spin-off, *A Different World*, where she worked as a story editor. In 1990, Fales-Hill was promoted to co-executive producer and head writer. Then, in 1995, she became executive producer of the CBS sitcom, *Can't Hurry Love*. In 1996, Fales-Hill served first as executive producer of the family-oriented situation comedy, *Kirk*, then as a consulting producer on the television series *Suddenly Susan*. In 1998, she co-created with Tim Reid the Showtime original series *Linc's*, and served for two seasons as its executive producer and head writer.

In 2003, Fales-Hill published *Always Wear Joy: My Mother Bold and Beautiful*, a critically acclaimed memoir about her mother. The book was a finalist for the NAACP Image Award and the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Award for Nonfiction. It was an Atlanta Daily Choice Awards winner, and received a starred review from Kirkus. Fales-Hill has authored two other books: 2010's novel, *One Flight Up*, and 2013's *Imperfect Bliss*. She has also written several magazine articles that have appeared in *Town & Country*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *American Heritage*, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Avenue*, and *Travel and Leisure*. From 2003 to 2006, Fales-Hill served as an elected director of the Harvard Alumni Association, and from 2003 to 2010 as a member of Harvard University's Committee on University Resources. She also served on the boards of the Studio Museum of Harlem and the American Ballet Theatre. From 2004 to 2007, Fales-Hill co-chaired the American Ballet Theatre Spring Gala.

Fales-Hill has also received many honors and awards. Under her leadership, *A Different World* was nominated for

the prestigious Humanitas Award. The episode she wrote on AIDS, "If I Should Die Before I Wake," received the 1991 Maggie Award from Planned Parenthood, the 13th Annual Media Access Award from the California Governor's Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons, and the Nancy Susan Reynolds Award. Fales-Hill has also received the the Producer's Guild of America's Nova award, a "Special Recognition Award" from the Friends of the Black Emmys, and the Excellence and Heritage Award from Dillard University. In 2001, she was named to the International Best Dressed List Hall of Fame.

Susan Fales-Hill was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 13, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Susan Fales-Hill was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 13, 2013, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television producer Susan Fales-Hill (1962 - ) was a writer on the *Cosby Show* and *A Different World*; executive producer of *Can't Hurry Love* and *Kirk*; and co-creator of the Showtime original series *Linc's*. She also authored three books: *Always Wear Joy: My Mother Bold and Beautiful*, *One Flight Up* and *Imperfect Bliss*.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Fales-Hill, Susan, 1962-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Fales-Hill, Susan, 1962---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Television Producer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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## 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 Susan Fales-Hill, December 13, 2013. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:16 ?

Susan Fales-Hill was born on August 15, 1962 in Rome, Italy to Josephine Premice and Timothy Fale. Fales-Hill's maternal grandmother, Thelomaine Premice, was the daughter of a horse trainer while her husband, Lucas Premice, was a political exile of Haiti. Fales-Hill's paternal lineage was traced to William Bradford, the first governor of Massachusetts, and many of her ancestors settled in Bristol, Rhode Island. Her paternal grandfather, DeCoursey Fales, Sr., served as the president of the New York Bank for Savings and the commodore of the New York Yacht Club. At one point, he owned the third largest private collection of first edition books, which became known as the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University. Fales-Hill's mother was a Tony award-winning actress who met Fales-Hill's father at one of her performances in New York City. They married and moved to Italy to escape social ridicule for their interracial marriage. A few years later, they returned to New York City's Upper West Side.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:39 ?

Susan Fales-Hill's first experience with racism was at five years old when she realized her African American mother, Josephine Premice, faced social challenges that her white father, Timothy Fales, did not like hailing a cab in New York City. While her mother performed as a professional actress and singer, her father conducted historical research, largely centered on Haiti and Guadeloupe. Fales-Hill began her elementary education at the private bilingual French school Lycee Francais de New York, which was founded in 1935 for Europeans fleeing the Holocaust. There, she encountered a racially diverse and international student body. Even though she was a somewhat private and fanciful child, Fales-Hill was quite academic and involved in theater while her brother, Enrico Fales, was more rebellious. Discussions about race, heritage and identity were common in her household, although later in her career, Fales-Hill learned from a Ph.D. student that an open dialogue about race in mixed-race families was rare.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:17 ?

Susan Fales-Hill's mother, Josephine Premice, decided to return to the United States from Italy after Fales-Hill's birth, as she thought it was vital that she understand her heritage. Fales-Hill's mother was an actress, and she was close with fellow entertainers Harry Belafonte, Diahann Carole and Roscoe Lee Brown, who often discussed the racial challenges of their profession at Fales-Hill's home. During summers, the family visited her paternal grandparents, Dorothy Mitchell Fales and DeCoursey Fales, Sr. Fales-Hill attended Lycee Francais de New York in New York City, where she became interested in literature and history. After graduating, she enrolled at Harvard University. There, she met broadcast journalist Soledad O'Brien, businesswoman Pamela Thomas-Graham and Wall Street banker Carla Harris. Fales-Hill describes the emphasis placed on proper etiquette in her upbringing, and the lack of decorum surrounding a controversial selfie taken at Nelson Mandela's funeral in 2013.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:16 ?

Susan Fales-Hill entered Harvard University in 1980, where she majored in French history and literature. At first, Fales-Hill was stigmatized by African American and white students alike for her socialite background. During the summers, she took additional courses, and worked as a Broadway publicist and at a perfumery in Paris, France. After producing poor grades in her first year, Fales-Hill decided to take time off to work at the Legal Aid Society in New York City. She returned to Harvard University a year later, and went on to

graduate in 1985. During this time, her mother introduced her to Bill Cosby; and impressed by her comedy style, he offered her a position on the writing team of 'The Cosby Show.' There, she worked with Matt Robinson, John Markus, Matt Williams, Carmen Finestra and Gary Kott, and consultant Dr. Alvin Poussaint. Initially, she was treated as an outsider, but later earned the teams' trust with her research skills. Fales-Hill recalls learning of her father's affair with a woman her age.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:07 ?

Susan Fales-Hill worked on the writing staff of 'The Cosby Show.' As a junior writer, Fales-Hill was mainly silent, and took time to learn the craft from the other senior writers. She left the show and became the story editor of 'A Different World' in 1987. After the first season, she was promoted to co-producer, and after the fourth season, she was named co-executive producer of the head writers. Because Fales-Hill disliked living in Los Angeles, California, she invested a significant amount of time in creating well-rounded characters like Whitley Gilbert. Fales-Hill's mother, Josephine Premice, and family friend, Diahann Carroll, were supportive of her career, and advised her to be fiscally responsible. During the series run, the writers and cast members developed a strong bond. The show featured radical topics like the apartheid in South Africa and AIDS awareness. In 1993, 'A Different World' was canceled due to the network's outrage over episodes depicting 1992 Los Angeles riots.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:41 ?

Susan Fales-Hill left 'A Different World' after its cancellation, and became an executive producer on the CBS television show 'Can't Hurry Love.' Fales-Hill worked there for a year before moving to Warner Brothers Television, where she produced 'Kirk,' whose season opener was filmed in Paris, France. Fales-Hill went on to act as a consultant for the television show, 'Suddenly Susan.' In 1998, she joined actor Tim Reid as executive producer and creator of 'Linc's,' a Showtime television series that lasted two seasons, and ended in 2000. Frustrated with the direction of black television shows, Fales-Hill decided to leave the entertainment business, and focus on writing. At that time, she moved back in New York City, and penned her memoir 'Always Wear Joy: My Mother Bold and Beautiful.' Additionally, Fales-Hill wrote novels 'One Flight Up' and 'Imperfect Bliss.' She describes her writing process, and the themes of her novels. She also recalls marrying her husband Aaron Hill, whom she met on a blind date.

Video Oral History Interview with Susan Fales-Hill, Section A2013\_321\_001\_007, TRT: 7:24:47 ?

Susan Fales-Hill had one daughter, Josephine Bristol Hill, with her husband Aaron Hill in 2003. In addition to writing the memoir, 'Always Wear Joy: My Mother Bold and Beautiful,' Fales-Hill became actively involved in arts and culture organizations like Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and the American Ballet Theatre. Fales-Hill reflects upon her family's legacy, her life and career, and her plans for the future, which potentially includes a return to the television industry. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the entertainment industry and African American community at large. Fales-Hill concludes the interview by reflecting on her legacy.