

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jill Nelson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Nelson, Jill, 1952-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson,
Dates:	November 11, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:25:01).
Abstract:	Author and journalist Jill Nelson (1952 -) wrote for The Washington Post Magazine, Village Voice and Essence. She also authored several books, including the National Bestseller <i>Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience</i> ; and the novels <i>Sexual Healing</i> and <i>Let's Get It On</i> . Nelson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 11, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_085
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist and author Jill Nelson was born on June 14, 1952 in Harlem, New York to dentist Stanley Earl Nelson and librarian A'Lelia Nelson. Nelson attended Solebury School, a boarding high school in New Hope, Pennsylvania; and went on to earn her B.A. degree in English and African American studies from the City College of New York in 1977, and M.S. degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism in 1980.

Nelson worked as a freelance journalist for various New York periodicals until 1986, when she accepted a staff position at the *Washington Post* and headed the new *Sunday* magazine. She left the *Post* in 1990 and pursued a career as a freelance writer once again. She wrote the screenplay for PBS-TV's *Mandela* in 1985, and *Two Dollars and a Dream* in 1989. In addition, she authored the screenplay for the U.S. Department of Education's *Michael's Journal* in 1991. From 1998 to 2003, Nelson worked as a professor of journalism at the City College of New York.

She contributed to numerous publications throughout her career, including *The New York Times*, *Essence*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, *Ms.*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Village Voice*, *USA Today*, *USA Weekend*, and msnbc.com. Nelson also served as a lecture on many occasions and was a monthly contributor to the Op Ed page of *USA Today*. She also hosted numerous writing workshops. In 1993, Nelson published her best-selling memoir, *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience*, which won an American Book Award. She also authored *Straight, No Chaser: How I Became A Grown-Up Black Woman*, which was published in 1997, *Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island*, published in 2005, and the novels *Sexual Healing* and *Let's Get It On*, which were published in 2003 and 2009, respectively. Nelson also edited *Police Brutality: An Anthology*, which was published in 2000. She was named the Washington, D.C. Journalist of the Year at *The Washington Post* in honor of her contributions to journalism.

Nelson and her husband, Flores Alexander Forbes, have a daughter and two grandsons.

Jill Nelson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 11, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jill Nelson was conducted by Harriette Cole on November 11, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Author and journalist Jill Nelson (1952 -) wrote for The Washington Post Magazine, Village Voice and Essence. She also authored several books, including the National Bestseller *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience*; and the novels *Sexual Healing* and *Let's Get It On*.

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:

Nelson, Jill, 1952-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Nelson, Jill, 1952---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Journalist

Author

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|MediaMakers

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 Jill Nelson, November 11, 2016. 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 Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_001, TRT: 1:24:33 ?

Jill Nelson was born on June 14, 1952 in New York City to A'Lelia Ransom

Nelson and Stanley Nelson, Sr. Her maternal great-grandfather, Diamond Cox, was politically active in Jackson, Mississippi. Nelson's maternal grandmother, Nettie Cox Ransom, moved to an affluent area of Indianapolis, Indiana, where she helped institute an all-black YMCA, while her husband, Freeman B. Ransom, served as the general manager of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. Nelson's paternal great-grandmother was a former slave who purchased land near Charlottesville, Virginia after emancipation. Her paternal grandparents, Florence Mills Nelson and Howard Nelson, eventually moved to Washington, D.C., where Nelson's father graduated from Howard University, and enrolled at Howard University College of Dentistry to avoid the draft. After earning her library science degree from Columbia University, her mother was hired at the Library of Congress. Nelson also talks about the history of police brutality in the United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_002, TRT: 2:28:15 ?

Jill Nelson's parents, A'Lelia Ransom Nelson and Stanley Nelson, Sr., met in Washington, D.C. when she was a librarian at the Library of Congress, and he was a student at the Howard University College of Dentistry. They then moved to New York City, where Nelson's father established his dental practice on Central Park South. Nelson and her four siblings attended the private New Lincoln School in Manhattan. As teenagers, she and her older brother, Stanley Nelson, were active in the antiwar movement. She also frequently attended live music performances at the Apollo Theater in New York City's Harlem neighborhood. After her parents divorced, her mother returned to work as a librarian at the City College of New York and her father later became a teacher of meditation. At this point in the interview, Nelson describes her early experiences of television, including the news coverage of the assassinations of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Malcolm X and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_003, TRT: 3:28:02 ?

Jill Nelson's parents, A'Lelia Ransom Nelson and Stanley Nelson, Sr., divorced when she was a teenager. During this time, she began to rebel, and was sent to a boarding high school called the Solebury School in New Hope, Pennsylvania. There, she had a brief, illicit relationship with one of her teachers. She then attended the City College of New York in New York City, but took a yearlong sabbatical to give birth to her daughter, Sunshine Muse, whom Nelson raised as a single parent. After obtaining her degree in English and black studies, Nelson worked as a freelance writer; and then enrolled at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1979. Her thesis, 'The Dope Kids of 115th Street,' was published as a cover story of the Village Voice once she graduated. She continued working as a freelance writer for various publications, including Essence magazine. There, Nelson met editors Audrey Edwards and Valerie Wilson Wesley, who encouraged her progressive views of politics and community.

Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_004, TRT: 4:28:04 ?

Jill Nelson was a freelance writer at Essence magazine in the early 1980s. In 1986, she was hired as a staff writer at The Washington Post Magazine on the recommendation of sports journalist Robert Lipsyte. Following the magazine's controversial first cover story, Nelson struggled to find willing interviewees, although she eventually profiled prominent figures like New York City civil rights attorney Alton H. Maddox, Jr., and Washington, D.C. attorney Michele A. Roberts. Soon, Nelson was able to pursue her own writing interests as she gained more credibility as a journalist. During this period, Nelson's daughter,

Sunshine Muse, transferred from private to public school in Washington, D.C., and then attended Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. After leaving The Washington Post Magazine in 1990, Nelson wrote her first book, 'Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience,' which was published three years later. She also continued to write for news organizations like USA Today, MSNBC and NiaOnline.

Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_005, TRT: 5:28:10 ?

Jill Nelson taught journalism at the City College of New York in New York City from 1998 to 2003. She eventually transitioned from freelancing to authoring both non-fiction and fiction works. Her essay collection 'Straight, No Chaser: How I Became a Grown-Up Black Woman' was published in 1997; and her personal narrative, 'Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island' was published in 2007. Nelson also wrote several novels, including 'Sexual Healing' and 'Let's Get It On.' At the time of the interview, she was married to writer and former Black Panther Party activist Flores Forbes. Nelson talks about the presidential campaign of Donald John Trump, and the Black Lives Matter movement in addition to her own activism. Nelson also describes her current writing project, and shares her advice to aspiring journalists. She then concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Jill Nelson, Section A2016_085_001_006, TRT: 6:07:57 ?

Jill Nelson narrates her photographs.