

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Oscar Brown, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Oscar
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr.,
Dates:	September 19, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:23:14).
Abstract:	Poet, entertainer, and music composer Oscar Brown, Jr. (1926 - 2005) was a black music theorist whose compositions included the song “Afro Blue” which was performed by Dianne Reeves, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Liz Wright. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 19, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born October 10, 1926, in Chicago, Oscar Brown, Jr. defied narrow definition. Throughout his forty-year career, he was part jazz singer, part poet, part entertainer and part songwriter. As an aspiring young playwright in 1960, Brown made an unprecedented two-hour appearance on NBC soon after writing "Kicks & Company". Though the play never made it to Broadway, Brown had arrived. He began sharing the stage with such greats as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Nancy Wilson and Julius "Cannonball" Adderley. His London-based, two-hour, one-man show, "Oscar Brown, Jr. Entertains," led him to be hailed as a musical genius. He also made headlines with a project that worked effectively with local gang members, done in conjunction with his performance partner and wife, Jean Pace. Among their many discoveries were the Jackson Five. A composer of several hundred songs and more than a dozen full-length feature pieces, Brown lived in Chicago with his family.

He passed away on May 29, 2005 at age 78.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Oscar Brown, Jr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on September 19, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet, entertainer, and music composer Oscar Brown, Jr. (1926 - 2005) was a black music theorist whose compositions included the song “Afro Blue” which was performed by Dianne Reeves, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Liz Wright.

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:

Brown, Oscar

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Oscar--Interviews

African American artists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American musicians--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American entertainers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

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 Oscar Brown, Jr., September 19, 2000. 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 Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_001, TRT: 1:31:08 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. describes his family background and his childhood. He shares early memories of his childhood neighborhoods in Virginia and Chicago, and describes the personalities of his parents.

Childhood--Illinois--Chicago.

African American families.

African American parents.

African American neighborhoods.

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_002, TRT: 2:31:17 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. provides a vivid description of

his childhood neighborhood of Bronzeville in Chicago. Brown discusses his many interests as a young person, including performing on the radio and his involvement with the Communist Party. Brown explains why college was not a good fit for him, and how he jump started his radio career using the radio to advance his left-wing political messages.

African American neighborhoods--Illinois--Chicago.

Communist parties.

Radio broadcasting--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Education (Higher).

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_003, TRT: 3:30:55 ?

Poet, songwriter and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. discusses his life and career in the 1950s and 1960s, including his efforts to mobilize labor unions, his involvement with the Communist Party, and his early musical career at Columbia Records. Brown also details the creation and production of his first play, 'Kicks and Company'.

African American political activists--Illinois--Chicago.

Communist parties.

Labor unions--United States.

African American musicians--Illinois--Chicago.

Theatrical productions.

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_004, TRT: 4:29:07 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. discusses his career path after the commercial failure of his play 'Kicks and Company'. Brown says he collaborated with many worthy and famous artists, but his own art was perceived as too political and radical. As a result, it did not achieve mainstream success. Brown then discusses his show 'Opportunity, Please Knock', which starred members of the Blackstone Rangers gang and helped to ease gang tensions in Chicago. Brown also shares his personal philosophy about African American skill in music, rhythm, and dance.

African American music.

Gangs--Illinois--Chicago.

Playwriting.

African American dancers.

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_005, TRT: 5:31:13 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. shares his personal philosophy on a wide variety of topics and expresses his hopes for the black community. He urges continued participation in the arts and advocates for artistic experimentation. Brown then talks about how his successful career has affected his personality, and reflects on the different places in the country where he has lived and performed.

African American communities.

African Americans in art.

Community activists.

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_006, TRT: 6:29:12 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. tells of how he met his partner and wife, Jean Pace, and details their relationship personally and in performance. Brown also shares his personal philosophy about race and taxation and explains why he has refrained from making income tax payments. Brown then considers

his legacy and performs one of his most enduring songs, 'Brown Baby'.

Pace, Jean

Taxation.

Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Oscar Brown, Jr., Section A2000_010_001_007, TRT: 7:20:22 ?

Poet, songwriter, and entertainer Oscar Brown Jr. describes photographs of himself with various people.

Photographs.