

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sterling Plumpp

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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>	Plumpp, Sterling, 1940-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 8, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:36).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Jazz and blues poet, african american studies professor, and english professor Sterling Plumpp (1940 - ) teaches at the University of Illinois Chicago. Plumpp was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 8, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_069
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chicago poet Sterling Plumpp was born January 30, 1940, in Clinton, Mississippi. Educated in public and religious schools, he graduated from high school in 1960 and went on to attend Roosevelt University in Chicago, earning a B.A. in 1968 and an M.A. in 1971.

Growing up poor in rural Mississippi, Plumpp worked in the cotton and cornfields and by the time he was eleven, he was expected to grow up to be a field hand. A bootlegger aunt had other plans for him, however, and paid for him to attend Holy Ghost High School in Jackson, Mississippi. Earning a scholarship to a small local college, Plumpp began his college education, but the scholarship money ran out, so he hitchhiked to Chicago in 1962. He worked in a post office until 1964, and during that time, he began writing his poetry.

Plumpp saw his first poems published in 1971 in *Negro Digest* and was hired to teach English and later African American studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His poetry, often based on blues and jazz rhythms, has won him numerous awards, including the Richard Wright Literary Excellence Award, the Carl Sandburg Literary Award for poetry, and three Illinois Arts Council awards. He has published twelve volumes of his work.

In recent years, Plumpp won a lottery jackpot, and he plans on leaving most of the money to his daughter, whose birth he describes as his most joyous occasion in life. Some of the money will also be used for returning to his native South, as well as a trip to Africa. Plumpp retired from UIC in 2001.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sterling Plumpp was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 8, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Jazz and blues poet, african american studies professor, and english professor Sterling Plumpp (1940 - ) teaches at the University of Illinois Chicago.

## 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:

Plumpp, Sterling, 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Plumpp, Sterling, 1940---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:

Jazz and Blues Poet

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Sterling Plumpp, April 8, 2003. 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 Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:17 ?

Sterling Plumpp was born on January 30, 1940 on an old plantation outside of Clinton, Mississippi. His maternal great-grandparents had been enslaved; his great-grandmother gave birth to his grandfather, Victor Emmanuel, in 1880 after an affair with a plantation farmer. Plumpp was born out of wedlock, and raised by his maternal grandparents in rural Mississippi. He describes his maternal grandfather and grandmother as religious people. Both were part-Choctaw Indian. Plumpp's grandmother was born in 1890 and died in 1993 at 103 years old. He describes his grandfather's personality in vivid detail—Plumpp retells a story of his grandfather's threatening a white sheriff and constable. Plumpp's father, Cyrus Plumpp, had a high school education and worked as a farmer and a laborer. His mother, Mary Emmanuel, later married Plumpp's stepfather, Charlie Shields. Plumpp recalls his family's reluctance to share stories of American slavery.

Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Sterling Plumpp describes the sights, sounds and smells of his childhood in rural Mississippi. He remembers the neighboring farmers and community events including revivals and hog-killings. Plumpp's most vivid memories are of an uncle's return from the U.S. Navy following World War II, and his experience with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Plumpp's grandparents baptized Plumpp in the Baptist faith, but by the time he was fourteen, he had converted to Catholicism. He briefly considered becoming a priest. In junior high school, Plumpp was a mediocre student. Plumpp's aunt, a successful bootlegger, paid for him to attend a Catholic high school. He attributes his improved grades in high school to his aunt's care and the increased competition amongst students. In 1960, Plumpp graduated high school and decided to attend Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas on a full scholarship. Plump recalls his mother's battle with cancer in the late 1970s.

Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_003, TRT: 0:20:14 ?

Sterling Plumpp attended Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas from 1960 to 1962. He dropped out and moved to Chicago, Illinois. He joined CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality, and participated in the 1966 March on Cicero. Plumpp was interested in becoming a writer and read a book a day. He was drafted into the U.S. Army and served from 1964 to 1965 at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Aberdeen, Maryland. Plumpp earned his B.A. degree in psychology from Chicago's Roosevelt University in 1968. In 1969, he joined the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) despite ambivalent feelings about Black Nationalist themes in 1960s black literature. Hoyt Fuller published Plumpp's first poetry in Negro Digest/Black World. Detroit, Michigan's Broadside Press and Chicago's Third World Press published Plumpp's poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Plumpp served as the founding director of the Institute of Positive Education in Chicago, but severed ties in the early 1970s when it joined the Congress of African People.

Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Sterling Plumpp began teaching at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1971 upon the recommendation of HistoryMaker Haki Madhubuti. In 1972, Madhubuti's Third World Press published Plumpp's 'Black Rituals,' an essay collection about language and the black church. Plumpp served as director of Chicago's Institute of Positive Education until 1973. The Institute split from the Congress of African People a year later, in 1974. In this part of the interview, Plumpp explains his views on religion, particularly the adoption of the Jewish salvation narrative by many black churches. He talks about American politics, the relationship between race and capitalism, and how the concept of 'blackness' informs American society and literature. Plumpp has primarily published his poetry including 'Ornate With Smoke' and 'Velvet BeBop Kente Cloth' with small literary magazines and Third World Press.

Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_005, TRT: 0:19:03 ?

Sterling Plumpp describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He examines the resurgence of poetry as a popular culture art form and the emergence of rap music. Plumpp talks about future writing projects, including writing a piece about United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. He concludes by reflecting upon his legacy and reciting from his poem, 'Clinton.'

Video Oral History Interview with Sterling Plumpp, Section A2003\_069\_001\_006, TRT: 0:12:04 ?

Sterling Plumpp describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.