

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joan Gray

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gray, Joan
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray,
Dates:	August 20, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:41:40).
Abstract:	Dancer and arts administrator Joan Gray (1949 -) was the president and a former dancer with the Muntu Dance Theater. Gray was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 20, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_199
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dancer and arts administrator Joan Gray, was born on July 29, 1949, in Chicago, Illinois, one of eight children, including her twin sister, Judi. Gray attended Chicago public schools and, after earning her high school diploma in 1967, went on to North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. From 1979 to 1986, Gray worked as an administrative assistant at South Shore Bank.

From 1984 on, Gray was a member of the Muntu Dance Theatre in Chicago. Muntu, from the Bantu word for “the essence of humanity,” was founded in 1972 on the South Side of Chicago by a group of young artists looking for a means of expressing their African heritage. In 1973, the group was joined by choreographer and dancer Alyo Tolbert, who helped them rise to the professional level. Gray first heard of Muntu in 1977 from a drummer who was on his way to the theater; though she did not join until 1984, by 1987 she had become president of the troupe. Gray continued to dance with the theater until 1991.

The performances put on by Muntu included dances from various African countries, such as Senegal, Mali, and Ghana, as well as dances from the Caribbean and the United States. Their performances are known to bring viewers to their feet dancing, and because the troupe so thoroughly studies the significance of each dance, they teach about the culture as the performance takes place.

In addition to her work with Muntu, Gray was active as a board member of the International Association of Blacks in Dance for over a decade, and served on the African American Arts Alliance and the Chicago Dance Coalition.

In addition to her career in dance and arts administration, Gray raised two children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joan Gray was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 20, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Dancer and arts administrator Joan Gray (1949 -) was the president and a former dancer with the Muntu Dance Theater.

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:

Gray, Joan

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gray, Joan --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Muntu Dance Theatre

Occupations:

Dancer

Arts Administrator

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 Joan Gray, August 20, 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).

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 Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Muntu Dance Theatre President Joan Gray talks about her family's background. She details her parents' personalities and describes growing up with her grandparents on Chicago's South Side. Gray discusses skin color prejudice within her family before recalling a few of her earliest memories. Joan Gray then mentions her religious involvement as a youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Muntu Dance Theatre President Joan Gray recalls her religious involvement as a

youth before talking about her introduction to music education. She talks in detail about her high school career and mentions influential teachers. Joan Gray talks about her grandmother's reaction to the Civil Rights Movement. She discusses her rebellious youth and her negative experiences in college in Naperville, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Muntu Dance Theatre President Joan Gray talks about her experience at Roosevelt University and subsequent work with the Black Panther Party. She then recalls her involvement with the Black Panther Party in Chicago and discusses the Panthers' cooperation with Chicago street gangs. Gray details the day Fred Hampton was assassinated. She remembers being under surveillance because of her political involvement. Joan Gray comments on the gender roles that were established within the Panther Party.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_004, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Muntu Dance Theatre President Joan Gray talks about her activities after leaving the Black Panther Party and then recalls her introduction to Muntu Dance Theatre. She discusses the public's reception to Muntu Dance Theatre before talking about Muntu Dance Theatre's growth in popularity. Joan Gray recounts the death of Muntu Dance Theatre's organizer, Alyo Tolbert.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_005, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Muntu Dance Theatre President Joan Gray discusses the direction of Muntu Dance Theatre after Alyo Tolbert. She then recalls the steps taken to keep the Muntu Dance Theatre afloat in the 1980s and details her current activities with Muntu Dance Theatre. Joan Gray shares her hopes for the black community and then considers her legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_001_006, TRT: 0:11:40 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Gray, Section A2003_199_Gray_Joan_06_MED_001, TRT: