

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Niara Sudarkasa

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sudarkasa, Niara
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa,
Dates:	January 13, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:04).
Abstract:	Academic administrator and anthropology professor Niara Sudarkasa (1938 - 2019) was the first African American woman to be appointed assistant professor of anthropology at New York University, the first African American to be appointed to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, the first female to serve as president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and the first African American to be installed as a chief in the historic Ife Kingdom of the Yoruba of Nigeria. She is Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Sudarkasa was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 13, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_014
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Accomplished scholar, educator, Africanist, and anthropologist, Niara Sudarkasa, was born Gloria Albertha Marshall on August 14, 1938, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Sudarkasa was a gifted student who excelled at Dillard Elementary and Dillard High School; skipping several grades, she was a junior at the age of fourteen, and accepted early admission to Fisk University on a Ford Foundation Scholarship when she was just fifteen years old. In 1955, Sudarkasa transferred to Oberlin to complete her studies. Sudarkasa earned her A.B. degree in anthropology and English from Oberlin in 1957. In 1959, Sudarkasa received her M.A. degree in anthropology from Columbia University. In 1961, Sudarkasa traveled to London and Nigeria to complete doctoral research on Yoruba language and culture. While completing her PhD, Sudarkasa taught at Columbia, becoming the first African American woman to teach at the university; she earned her PhD from Columbia in 1964.

Sudarkasa achieved another first when she became the first African American woman to be appointed assistant professor of anthropology at New York University in 1964. Sudarkasa was also the first African American to be appointed to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan in 1969. While at Michigan, Sudarkasa became involved in civil rights and student issues; she quickly climbed the academic ladder at Michigan, ending her seventeen year tenure as associate vice president for academic affairs. Sudarkasa left Michigan in 1986 when she became the first female to serve as president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

Sudarkasa passed away on May 31, 2019.

Sudarkasa's accomplishments at Lincoln are highlighted in the report, *Lincoln University – The Drive Toward Distinction*. Under Sudarkasa's presidency the university increased enrollment, strengthened its undergraduate and international programs, and put into place an ambitious minority recruitment effort; she left her post at Lincoln in 1998.

Sudarkasa serves as Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale. Sudarkasa has authored numerous publications, including *The Strength of Our Mothers: African And African American Women in Families*; *Where Women Work: Yoruba Traders in the Marketplace and in the Home*; and *Exploring the African American Experience*. Sudarkasa has been awarded thirteen honorary degrees over the course of her career, including one from Ft. Hare in South Africa, and is the recipient of nearly 100 civic and professional awards. In 2001 Sudarkasa became the first African American to be installed as a chief in the historic Ife Kingdom of the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Sudarkasa passed away on May 31, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Niara Sudarkasa was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on January 13, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator and anthropology professor Niara Sudarkasa (1938 - 2019) was the first African American woman to be appointed assistant professor of anthropology at New York University, the first African American to be appointed to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, the first female to serve as president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and the first African American to be installed as a chief in the historic Ife Kingdom of the Yoruba of Nigeria. She is Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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:

Sudarkasa, Niara

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Sudarkasa, Niara--Interviews

African American anthropologists--Interviews

African American college presidents--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

University President

Anthropology Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Niara Sudarkasa, January 13, 2005. 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 Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_001, TRT: 0:30:34 ?

Niara Sudarkasa was born Gloria Albertha Marshall on August 14, 1938 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida to Rowena Evans Marshall and Alex Jarlton. Her mother's family is of Scottish, Seminole and Bahamian ancestry. Her maternal ancestors fled to Andros Island in the Bahamas during the Seminole Wars. Sudarkasa's mother was born in 1921 to Tryphenia McNeal Evans and Alpheus Evans in West Palm Beach. Sudarkasa's father's family came from South Carolina. Her parents never married. Apart from her father, her grandmother was the only relative from her paternal family that she knew. Sudarkasa's father served in the U.S. Army during World War II, worked in a hotel and owned a bar. Sudarkasa's mother was the first woman in Fort Lauderdale to own a dry cleaning business. She moved to New York City when Sudarkasa was twelve years old to earn money for her children's schooling. Sudarkasa remembers telling entertaining stories as her grandmother washed laundry, walking on hot sand and the sounds of insects at night.

African American anthropologists--Interviews.

African American college presidents--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_002, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Niara Sudarkasa grew up in a small rural community on the outskirts of Fort Lauderdale. In 1945, her family used a flatbed truck to move their entire home into Fort Lauderdale's black community. Sudarkasa enjoyed reading and excelled at Dillard Elementary and High School. She entered school a year early and skipped sixth grade. However, being two years younger than her classmates caused her to struggle socially. She remembers her grandmother's admiration for Mary McLeod Bethune and how inspired she felt when her grandmother told her she could follow in Bethune's footsteps. Sudarkasa did not aspire to higher education when she was young, but her mother insisted she attend college. Working on her high school's newspaper sparked her interest in journalism. In the eleventh grade, she was part of a group of gifted children tested for early college acceptance and scholarships. After completing the test, Sudarkasa accepted a scholarship to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee at the age of fifteen.

Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_003, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Niara Sudarkasa attended Fisk University at fifteen years old as part of the early

entrance honors program. She studied English and sociology with the intention to pursue journalism. After participating in an exchange program at Oberlin College, Sudarkasa realized that she preferred the academic challenges and social life there. She transferred, changed her major from journalism to anthropology, and earned her B.S. degree in anthropology and sociology in 1957. Although she enjoyed Oberlin, Sudarkasa missed the career guidance provided at Fisk. She attended graduate school for anthropology at Columbia University while living with her mother in New York City. For her dissertation, she completed an ethnographic study of market women in Nigeria. She remembers her positive interactions with those women and notes how the Nigerian civil war impacted the country. Upon her return, she taught at Columbia and earned her Ph.D. in 1964. She published 'Where Women Work,' a revised version of her thesis, in 1973.

Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_004, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

Niara Sudarkasa taught at New York University for three years. Not wanting to raise her young son in a city, she accepted a position at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The day after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, Sudarkasa delivered a lecture about his death to her students. After returning from Ghana in 1969, she became the faculty advisor for the Black Action Movement, which sought to increase minority enrollment at the University of Michigan. Sudarkasa also accepted a joint appointment in anthropology and Afro-American studies and taught courses on the black family and African cultural heritage. She was appointed associate vice president for academic affairs at Michigan and studied the school's policy towards minority students. In 1987, she became the first female president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. She describes the issues surrounding affirmative action, the Grutter v. Bollinger case, and her concern for historically black college.

Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_005, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Niara Sudarkasa became the president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1987. At the beginning of her tenure, she planned to use the expertise she acquired at the University of Michigan to strengthen the university's academic reputation and its international programs. During her eleven-year presidency, Sudarkasa revitalized the university, raised standards for admission, increased enrollment and oversaw the construction of new buildings on campus. She describes the controversy that led to her leaving Lincoln University in 1998 and her thoughts about receiving the university's President's Award in 2003. She accepted a post as a visiting professor at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, then as scholar-in-residence at the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale. Sudarkasa shares her concerns about standardized tests, the state of education, factors that impact student success and the diminished relationship between teachers and students' families.

Video Oral History Interview with Niara Sudarkasa, Section A2005_014_001_006, TRT: 0:22:44 ?

Niara Sudarkasa, as the scholar-in-residence at the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, oversaw the inaugural year program for the library. The African-American Research Library and Cultural Center serves a repository of information for African Americans and people of African descent from Florida, South America and the Caribbean. Sudarkasa describes her son, Michael Sudarkasa, a lawyer working and living in South Africa with his five children. At the time of the interview, Sudarkasa planned to spend the summer with her granddaughter, Jasmine Sudarkasa. Sudarkasa remembers the support and advice she received from her maternal

grandmother, and reflects upon her life and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the tape by narrating her photographs.