

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Carole Simpson

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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>	Simpson, Carole, 1940-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 9, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:25:16).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Television news anchor Carole Simpson (1940 - ) was the first African American woman to become a Chicago television reporter, working for NBC affiliate, WMAQ-TV. She went on to become a Washington, D.C. correspondent for the NBC Nightly News, then joined ABC News as a correspondent eventually becoming Sunday anchor of ABC's World News Tonight. Simpson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 9, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_249
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Award winning journalist Carole Estelle Simpson was born on December 7, 1940, in Chicago, Illinois. Simpson became involved in drama in elementary school and high school, training her at a young age to articulate and project her voice for television and radio. In 1958, Simpson graduated from high school and attended the University of Illinois. After attending the University of Illinois for two years, Simpson transferred to the University of Michigan where she graduated in 1962 with her B.A. degree in journalism; she was the only black journalism major in her graduating class. While pursuing her B.A. degree, Simpson received her first media experience by working at a community newspaper during her summer breaks.

After graduating from college, Simpson was hired as a journalism instructor and publicist at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama; she held this position for two years before becoming a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where she chose broadcast media over print journalism. In 1965, Simpson returned to Chicago to become the first woman to broadcast news in the city's history when she was hired at WCFL Radio. In 1968, Simpson changed stations and began working for Chicago's WBBM Radio as a news reporter and anchor. While working for Chicago's WBBM, Simpson covered the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial. She also served as a commentator for the public affairs series *Our People* until 1970. After working for WBBM, Simpson became Chicago's first black female television reporter, while working for the NBC affiliate, WMAQ-TV. While working as a journalist in Chicago, Simpson also taught journalism courses at Northwestern University.

In 1974, Simpson was hired as a Washington, D.C. correspondent for the *NBC Nightly News*. In 1982, Simpson joined ABC News as a correspondent and covered then-Vice President George H.W. Bush on his domestic and foreign trips. She also went on to cover his 1988 presidential campaign. In 1986, Simpson reported live from the Philippine Islands on the fall of the country's president, Ferdinand Marcos. In 1988, she was hired as a Sunday

news anchor for ABC's *World News Tonight*. In 1992, Simpson was the first woman and minority to ever moderate a presidential debate held at the University of Richmond between George H.W. Bush, Ross Perot and then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton; the debate was also the first to be held in the town hall meeting format. For ABC's *Nightline*, Simpson covered the release from prison of South African civil rights leader Nelson Mandela after twenty-seven years for his anti-apartheid activities; while covering the story, she was beaten by a South African police officer. Throughout the 1990s, Simpson reported on several breaking news stories including the controversial Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill hearings, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Senate impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton.

Simpson ended her career as a weekend ABC anchor in 2003, but had a contract with the network until 2005. Simpson became the ambassador for the network, traveling throughout the country and speaking in schools. Simpson's new role consisted of visiting public schools to help students make a sense of the changing media landscape; she launched the program at her old high school in Chicago. Simpson has established six scholarships for women and minorities majoring in journalism at the post-secondary level. In 2007, Simpson was hired as Leader in Residence at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Carole Simpson was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 9, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television news anchor Carole Simpson (1940 - ) was the first African American woman to become a Chicago television reporter, working for NBC affiliate, WMAQ-TV. She went on to become a Washington, D.C. correspondent for the NBC Nightly News, then joined ABC News as a correspondent eventually becoming Sunday anchor of ABC's *World News Tonight*.

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## 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:

Simpson, Carole, 1940-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Simpson, Carole, 1940---Interviews

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Women broadcasters--Interviews

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African American television journalists--Interviews

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Radio journalists--Interviews

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African American radio broadcasters--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:

Television News Anchor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Carole Simpson, September 9, 2007. 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 Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:03 ?

Carole Simpson was born on December 7 1940 in Chicago, Illinois to Doretha Wilbon Simpson and Lytle Simpson. Simpson's mother came to Chicago from Washington, Georgia, where she was the oldest daughter of a white Baptist circuit preacher named Frank Wilbon, who was shunned for his relationship with Simpson's grandmother, an African American woman named Eliza Wilbon. As a teenager, Simpson's mother was sent by her father to live with relatives in Chicago, where she became a seamstress. Simpson's father was born in Terre Haute, Indiana to a Cherokee Native American mother and African American father who was a teacher. As a teenager, her father moved to Chicago, where he attended Wendell Phillips High School, and worked as a barber. Although he aspired to be an artist, he eventually became a landlord. He also serviced radios for hotels, and worked as a mailman. As a child, Simpson lived in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood, and moved to Chatham at fourteen years old. She also describes her early love of reading.

Women broadcasters--Interviews.

African American television journalists--Interviews.

Radio journalists--Interviews.

African American radio broadcasters--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Carole Simpson attended James Wadsworth Elementary School and Austin O. Sexton Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois, where she was taught by Delphine Healey. Simpson was recommended to attend the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, but her family could not afford the tuition. Instead, she enrolled at Hyde Park High School, where she belonged to the drama club and National Honor Society. She also wrote for The Hyde Parker, which inspired her to become a journalist. Simpson's family were also avid readers of newspapers like the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times and Chicago Defender; as well as Jet and Ebony magazines. Although her mother considered journalism to be impractical, Simpson applied to the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. However, she was rejected. Simpson's older sister, Jacqueline Simpson Dillard, studied at Northwestern University on a

music scholarship, but later chose not to pursue an opera career.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

Carole Simpson attended the University of Illinois in Chicago, Illinois for two years, and then transferred to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There, she wrote for The Michigan Daily, where the editor, activist Tom Hayden, was later one of the Chicago Seven. For two summers, Simpson interned at Congressman Gus Savage's Citizen newspaper. Upon graduating in 1962, she received no job offers in her field, and instead accepted a position at the Chicago Public Library. Eventually, Simpson replaced Samuel Yette as head of the information bureau at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. There, she was exposed to life in the segregated South, including color discrimination among African Americans, for the first time. Although Simpson did not participate in civil rights protests, she encouraged her journalism students to take part. In 1964, Simpson began working toward a master's degree in journalism at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. There, she studied broadcast, and worked for WSUI Radio.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Carole Simpson graduated from the University of Iowa in 1965, after meeting her husband, James E. Marshall, at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Simpson considered working at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, but instead pursued broadcast journalism at WCFL Radio in Chicago, Illinois, and became Chicago's first female broadcast news reporter. In 1968, she joined WBBM Radio, and also hosted the public broadcast show 'Our People' on WTTW-TV with Jim Tilmon. During this time, the Congress of Racial Equality began pressuring television stations to hire African American broadcasters and crewmembers. Simpson soon transitioned to television broadcast at WMAQ-TV, Chicago's NBC affiliate, as a reporter alongside Russ Ewing. She describes her experiences of racial and gender discrimination at work, including at WCFL Radio, where she was harassed by male coworkers who tried to sabotage her newscasts on the air. Later, she was also harassed by anchorman Floyd Kalber at WMAQ-TV.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

Carole Simpson was a general assignment reporter at WMAQ-TV in Chicago, Illinois, where she worked with Russ Ewing to cover subjects like gang violence and Mayor Richard J. Daley's administration. Simpson insisted on depicting African Americans fairly in her newscasts, and was a member of the National Association of Black Journalists alongside fellow Chicago journalist Francis Ward. In 1974, she began working as a network correspondent at NBC in Washington, D.C., where she covered the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, although she wanted to cover the U.S. Congress or the White House. Simpson was continuously passed over for assignments and air time by her station manager, so she appealed to a NBC executive. After threatening to quit, Simpson was promoted to anchor on 'NBC Nightly News.' In 1982, she left NBC to work at ABC; and, in 1988, became an anchor on 'ABC Evening News.' She worked with ABC News president Roone Arledge, and ABC co-anchors Peter Jennings, Max Robinson and Frank Reynolds.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

Carole Simpson worked with news correspondents Bettina Gregory and Susan King at ABC in Washington, D.C. Unhappy with the absence of women in senior positions at ABC, Simpson and her female coworkers conducted gender and racial demographic research in each department, and presented the findings to ABC president Roone Arledge and other executives. As a result, female

employees' salaries were raised; a woman was appointed as a vice president; and Simpson became a news anchor in 1988. Simpson also advocated for racial equality at ABC. The incident became a case study at the Harvard Business School. During this time, Simpson covered teen pregnancy, poverty and juvenile crime for the American Agenda segment on 'ABC World News Tonight.' She also covered U.S. Congress' attempt to eliminate a food program for seniors, and rallied public support for the program. Simpson also talks about the impact of conglomerate ownership of news networks; freedom of speech; and radio host Don Imus' discriminatory comments in 2007.

Video Oral History Interview with Carole Simpson, Section A2007\_249\_001\_007, TRT: 0:28:04 ?

Carole Simpson covered Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 from Soweto, South Africa, where she met F.W. de Klerk, P.W. Botha, and Bishop Desmond Tutu. Then, in 1992, Simpson moderated the second presidential debate between President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton and President George Herbert Walker Bush, becoming the first African American and the first woman to moderate a presidential debate. Simpson established six scholarships for aspiring journalists through the National Association of Black Journalists; the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and the Radio Television Digital News Association. She also received Emmy Awards, the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, and the Peabody Award for journalism. She talks about her husband, James E. Marshall; her daughter, Mallika Marshall; and her adopted son, Adam Simpson-Marshall. Simpson reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community; her career, life and legacy; and how she would like to be remembered.