

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Morris, Calvin S. (Calvin Sylvester), 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris,
Dates:	March 21, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:56:00).
Abstract:	Nonprofit executive Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris (1941 -) was affiliated for many years with Howard University's School of Divinity and was active with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Operation Breadbasket (Rainbow/PUSH Coalition), and a number of other civil rights organizations. Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 21, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_053
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive the Reverend Dr. Calvin Sylvester Morris was born March 16, 1941, in Philadelphia. He attended Meade Elementary School and Vaux Junior High School. Morris was awarded a partial scholarship to Friends Select High School, a private Quaker school known for its high standards. One of two black students in his class, Morris graduated with honors in 1959. He then went on to Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania graduating cum laude in 1963 with a B.A. in history. At Boston University, he earned an M.A. in history in 1964 and an S.B.T. in theology in 1967. Morris was also ordained in the United Methodist Church.

Later in 1967, Morris moved to Chicago to work on his Ph.D., but was asked by the Reverend Jesse Jackson to become the associate director and national coordinator of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Operation Breadbasket, now the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. He served from 1967 to 1971, through the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Fred Hampton. Breadbasket attracted activists and celebrities like Fannie Lou Hamer, Bill Cosby, Julius "Cannonball" Adderly, Rosa Parks, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Mahalia Jackson and Sammy Davis, Jr.

From 1971 to 1973, Morris was coordinator of the African American Studies Program at Simmons College in Boston. As executive director of Atlanta's Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change from 1973 to 1976, Morris was again associated with SCLC as he worked directly with Coretta Scott King. In 1976, he began a sixteen-year professional association with Howard University's School of Divinity during which he worked as director of ministries to church and Society, director of field education and associate professor of pastoral theology. Morris earned his Ph.D. in American history from Boston University in 1982. He was executive vice president of Academic Services and academic dean at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta from 1992 to 1998. Chicago's Community Renewal Society (CRS) hired Morris as executive director in 1998. At CRS, Morris presides over two publications, a staff of forty-seven and a budget of \$4.5 million.

Morris is a board member of the Golden Apple Foundation, Chicago Chamber Musicians, Chicago Theater Company, *Sojourner* and the Wieboldt Foundation. He is a co-convener of the Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago and is a co-chairman of Jobs for Justice Clergy Committee. Morris was elected treasurer of the Board of Trustees of Lincoln University, his alma mater. He lives near his daughter in Chicago.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 21, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit executive Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris (1941 -) was affiliated for many years with Howard University's School of Divinity and was active with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Operation Breadbasket (Rainbow/PUSH Coalition), and a number of other civil rights organizations.

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:

Morris, Calvin S. (Calvin Sylvester), 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Morris, Calvin S. (Calvin Sylvester), 1941---Interviews

African American theologians--Interviews

African American clergy--Georgia--Interviews

Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Community Renewal Society (Chicago, Ill.)

Howard University

Occupations:

Nonprofit Executive

Minister

Theologian

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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 Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, March 21, 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 Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_001, TRT: 0:28:35 ?

Calvin Morris describes his family background. His maternal great-grandfather, Jeremiah Morris, was an African Methodist Episcopal minister in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He and Ida Turner gave birth to Ida Lydia Turner Morris in the late 1800s. She gave birth to Morris' mother, Dorothy Morris, in the early 1900s. Morris' father, Abner Williams, was born into a family of entrepreneurs in 1916 in Mt. Olive, North Carolina. He met Dorothy Morris after moving to Philadelphia, and the couple gave birth to their only child, Calvin Morris, on March 16, 1941. Morris raised her son with the help of her parents, with whom she lived. Dorothy Morris suffered from rheumatic fever and was often ill, yet occasionally worked as a hotel chambermaid. As a child, Morris loved music, a passion that was fueled by his family's musical talents. He sang at local churches, and also read newspapers like "The Philadelphia Tribune" and the "Pittsburgh Courier". Morris also talked about the African United Methodist Protestant Church.

African American theologians--Interviews.

African American clergy--Georgia--Interviews.

Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Calvin Morris describes his father, Abner Williams. He moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from North Carolina as a young man, and worked as a numbers runner and for the streets and sanitation department. He went on to own a business, and was active in his Baptist church. Morris grew up in the home of his grandmother, Ida Lydia Turner Morris, the family "nucleus". As a youth, Morris enjoyed eating her chicken and dumplings and pot pie. He was also exposed to southern cuisine, like fried cornbread, for the first time. Morris' North Philadelphia neighborhood was close-knit, and he enjoyed playing pinochle, marbles, and building scooters with his friends. After his grandmother's death in 1958, Morris lived with his father and stepmother for a year in West Philadelphia. Morris excelled as a student at George E. Meade Elementary School, where he enjoyed reading, history, and spelling. Morris describes his father's pride in his accomplishments, as well as experiencing his mother's death at twenty-six years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

In 1954, Calvin Morris enrolled at Vaux Junior High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was class president and an honors student. In 1955, he was offered a partial scholarship to the Quakers' Friends Select School. Morris was elected class president during each of his years there. The school also promoted a culture of activism and social awareness, and Morris raised money for the Montgomery Boycotts and read the Sunday New York Times regularly. He was also closely mentored by the school custodian. Morris was motivated by his mentor, Reverend Dennis Fletcher, to attend Lincoln University, a Historically Black University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Thus, upon graduating from Friends Select School in 1959, Morris enrolled at Lincoln, where he sang in the chapel choir, was on the Dean's List, was a student senator, and pledged Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He helped reorganize the campus chapter of the NAACP, as well. Morris was also influenced by the university's chaplain and one of his white professors.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Calvin Morris engaged in the activist culture at Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, and had his first experience with overt discrimination. Morris aspired to become a lawyer, but lost interest in this dream. Morris graduated in 1963, and applied for a United Methodist Crusade Scholarship, which funded his Master's degree program at Boston University from 1963 to 1964, and his first year at Boston University School of Theology in 1964. After graduating in 1967, Morris moved to Chicago to pursue a doctorate degree at the University of Chicago; yet, HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, convinced him to become involved with Operation Breadbasket, and he was appointed as associate director in 1968. Upon the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Operation Breadbasket grew tremendously, gaining support from individuals like HistoryMakers Julian Bond and Reverend Clay Evans, and Muhammad Ali. Morris oversaw the daily operations of the organization in Chicago, and the Political Education Division.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_005, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

After the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Operation Breadbasket grew. The assassination caused the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to enter into a state of flux, as staff felt directionless, and many debated over Dr. King's successor. As HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson organized more chapters of Operation Breadbasket, tension between him and the SCLC grew, leading to a break with the organization in 1971 and form Operation PUSH. In 1971, Calvin Morris moved to Boston, Massachusetts to teach and work on his marriage. He was also offered a position as Executive Director of The Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, and accepted 1973 when he separated from his wife. At The King Center, Morris developed a staff and a programmatic focus. He also became associate pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and talked about the Marcus Chenault shooting which killed Alberta Williams King. Morris was relieved of his position at The King Center in 1976.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_006, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

In 1973, Calvin Morris was hired as Executive Director for The Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, where he faced challenges with staffing and a narrow programmatic focus. Coretta Scott King's management style caused a rift between her and Morris, leading to his relief in 1976. Morris

was then hired as Director of Field Education and Howard University School of Divinity, where he built relationships between the school and local pastors. In 1982, Morris received his Ph.D. degree in American history from Boston University, and began teaching at the Howard University School of Divinity. Morris' dissertation was on Reverdy Cassius Ransom, an African Methodist Episcopal bishop. Morris was also influenced by Howard Thurman, who was considered a mystic by some. According to Morris, Thurman did not need doctrine to guide his relationship with God. Morris describes two of Thurman's works, "The Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death" and "Jesus and the Disinherited," and his religious philosophy.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_007,
TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Calvin Morris worked for Howard University School of Divinity from 1976 to 1992. During his time there, he persuaded his good friend, HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., as well as Bishop Desmond Tutu, to speak at the university. In 1992, Morris was hired as a dean at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. He left in 1998 to serve as the Executive Director of the Community Renewal Society. The organization, which was founded in 1882 in Chicago, Illinois, combats racism and poverty in the City of Chicago. Morris led community organizing efforts to fight against the Chicago Housing Authority, and worked with HistoryMakers Constance Howard and Danny K. Davis to enforce criminal justice reform. Morris also led the Community Renewal Society to convene the Justice Coalition of Greater Chicago. Morris talked about "Catalyst Chicago" and the "Chicago Reporter," publications of the Community Renewal Society, and the organization's stance against the War in Iraq.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_008,
TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Calvin Morris describes his concerns surrounding the criminal justice system and American society's devaluation of young people. Furthermore, Morris argues that young people are not provided with enough resources to prevent them from engaging in crime, as it is economically advantageous to introduce troubled youth into the criminal justice system early. Morris charges community organizations, ministers, and religious groups to intervene on behalf of young people, in the form of mentorship and education. He also comments on the public's lack of interest in the political process. Morris hopes to leave behind a legacy as someone who was faithful, and helped others as a result. He would also like to be remembered as someone who loved genuinely and tried to make a difference. He closes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_009,
TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Calvin Morris narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. Calvin Morris, Section A2003_053_001_010,
TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Calvin Morris narrates his photographs.