

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Fletcher, Bill, Jr.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr.,
Dates:	January 14, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:15).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. (1954 -) was the President and CEO of TransAfrica Forum, and a labor activist who worked with such organizations as the Boston Jobs Coalition, Greater Boston Legal Services, District-65 United Auto Workers, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the AFL-CIO and the George Meany Center for Labor Studies. Fletcher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 14, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_016
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr was born on June 21, 1954 in New York City. His mother was a teacher and his father, a salesman. Motivated by the civil rights movement Fletcher became an activist at age 13, dabbling in the Black Panther Party and organizing rallies and events. While a student at Mount Vernon High School he helped form the Black Student Alliance and was active in student politics. He earned his high school diploma in 1972.

As a young student at Harvard University, Fletcher became interested in the labor movement. Upon earning his B.A. degree in government in 1976, he spent the next three years working as a welder at a Massachusetts shipbuilding company. After receiving hands on experience as a laborer, Fletcher worked as an organizer for the Boston Jobs Coalition, and a paralegal at Greater Boston Legal Services.

In 1986, Fletcher relocated to Washington, D.C. to serve as an organizer for District-65 United Auto Workers. He then went on to become the organizational secretary and administrative director for the National Postal Mail Handlers Union. From 1991 until 1996, Fletcher held a number of positions with the Service Employees International Union including director of education and assistant to the president. In 1996, he joined the AFL-CIO serving as education director and the assistant to President John Sweeney. After leaving the AFL-CIO in 2001, Fletcher joined the George Meany Center for Labor Studies, where he was responsible for developing relationships with foreign labor centers. In 2002, Fletcher accepted the position of president and CEO of TransAfrica Forum, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the general public on U.S. foreign policy as it affects Africa and the Diaspora in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Fletcher is the author of numerous publications highlighting and chronicling African Americans and the U.S. labor movement. He and his wife, Candice reside in Mitchellville, Maryland and have a teenage daughter.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on January 14, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. (1954 -) was the President and CEO of TransAfrica Forum, and a labor activist who worked with such organizations as the Boston Jobs Coalition, Greater Boston Legal Services, District-65 United Auto Workers, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, the AFL-CIO and the George Meany Center for Labor Studies.

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:

Fletcher, Bill, Jr.

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Fletcher, Bill, Jr.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Transafrica Forum (Organization)

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., January 14, 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 William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., Section A2005_016_001_001, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. was born on June 21, 1954 in New York, New York. His mother, Joan Carter Fletcher, was born in Arlington, Massachusetts and was raised in her early childhood by her grandparents there; her grandfather was the poet and literary critic William Braithwaite, whose family came from the West Indies. As a teen she moved to New York City and lived with her parents. Fletcher's father, William Fletcher, Sr., was from Reading, Pennsylvania. His family traced their lineage to the Shawnee leader Tecumseh. Fletcher, Sr.'s family was race-conscious but still valued light skin over dark skin, something which shamed him. Fletcher, Sr. grew up near a member of the German American Bund, a pro-Nazi group formed slightly before World War II. Fletcher was raised in Harlem with his younger sister; when he was seven, the family sold their home to George Benson and moved to the Bronx. Fletcher remembers being asked by his father and great-grandfather for his opinion about U.S. intervention in Laos.

Video Oral History Interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., Section A2005_016_001_002, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. moved to the Bronx, New York, New York when he was seven years old. In his new neighborhood, he had one close friend and learned to navigate the block's dynamics, where boys often fought and switched allegiances. In fifth grade, he had his first girlfriend; he liked playing games such as tag and ring-a-levio with his peers. Although a good student, a racist teacher placed Fletcher in one of the lower tracks, after which he tried to remain in the highest grade track possible. In junior high school, Fletcher was introduced to radical politics by way of Muhammad Speaks, the Nation of Islam's newspaper. He was inspired by Malcolm X and found ways to support the Black Panther Party as a non-member since his father would not let him join. His peers respected and admired his commitment to black and leftist causes. Fletcher attended Stuyvesant High School in the Bronx. His family moved to Mount Vernon, New York but he continued to commute to the Bronx to finish his secondary education.

Video Oral History Interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., Section A2005_016_001_003, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. attended Mount Vernon High School after his family moved to Mount Vernon, New York. In January 1969, Fletcher ran track briefly and participated in a student takeover of the school demanding recognition of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, among other things. He also helped form the Black Student Union and Uhuru before graduating in 1972. Fletcher wanted to attend Duke University but chose Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts after visiting during a black student takeover protesting the school's investment in Gulf Oil Corporation. At Harvard, he became interested in workers' rights and the labor movement and began to actively study socialism. He was mentored by trade unionist and Harvard Afro American Studies chair Ewart Guinier, father of HistoryMaker Lani Guinier. During this time, he met his future wife, Candice Cason. Upon graduating in 1976, Fletcher went to work for Fore River shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts as a welder for three and a half years.

Video Oral History Interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., Section A2005_016_001_004, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. was seriously injured in 1978 while working as a welder. He went into organizing, working for Boston Jobs Coalition. He did paralegal work for Greater Boston Legal Services from 1982 to 1986. That year, Fletcher's first daughter was born prematurely and died, grieving him and his

wife. They both began to work demanding jobs; Fletcher was an organizer for the United Auto Workers. Upon being hired at National Postal Mail Handlers Union in 1989, he moved to Washington, D.C. In 1991, he began working at SEIU, where he remained in various roles until 1996. He then joined AFL-CIO as assistant to its president, John Sweeney. Fletcher had qualms with Sweeney's chief of staff, Bob Welch, and after discovering a good friend, Nadra Floyd, was mistreated by Welch and other colleagues, he decided to leave. Fletcher was hired at TransAfrica Forum. He explains TransAfrica's mission and history and the importance of addressing international issues that affect the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with William Gerald Fletcher, Jr., Section A2005_016_001_005, TRT: 0:13:55 ?

William Gerald Fletcher, Jr. began serving as president of TransAfrica Forum in 2002. During his tenure, he was critical of U.S. foreign policy for Africa under George W. Bush's presidential administration. He describes his hopes for the unity of the African continent and talks about the effects of European colonialism in creating national and ethnic divisions on the continent. Fletcher talks about his daughter, Yasmin Fletcher, and reflects upon his own life, imagining what his fourteen-year-old self would think of his current self. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.