

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Barry Williams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Williams, Barry, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams,
Dates:	October 11, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:28:55).
Abstract:	Investment chief executive Barry Williams (1944 -) is the founder of Williams Pacific Ventures, Inc., a real estate and private equity investment and consulting firm. He co-founded the African American Experience Fund for the National Park Foundation, and serves as a director of the PG&E Corporation. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 11, 2005, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_240
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Barry Williams was born on July 21, 1944, and raised by his parents, Otis and Ilza Williams, in a racially diverse community in Mt. Vernon, New York. His parents, both college graduates, instilled strong values of education, hard work, and family in their three children. Williams attended Grimes Elementary School as a young child. He graduated from George Washington Junior High, and later went to high school at a small boarding school in New England.

In 1962, Williams entered Harvard University. While there, he was elected class marshall and played college basketball. Williams received his B.A. degree in 1966 from Harvard University. He then won a fellowship through Corning Glass that allowed him to travel around the world for fourteen months. Williams traveled through Europe, Latin America, and Africa. In 1968, Williams returned to Harvard to study law and business. In 1971, he received his J.D. degree and M.B.A. degrees jointly from Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School.

Upon graduating, Williams moved to San Francisco where he worked at the international management consulting firm of McKinsey and Company until 1979. Harvard University awarded Williams the Harvard Medal in 1979 for his outstanding service in business and the community, and at Harvard University. Between 1979 and 1986, Williams worked as managing principal at Bechtel Group. In 1987, he founded Williams Pacific Ventures, Inc., a real estate and private equity investment and consulting firm.

Since 1990, Williams has served on the board of directors of Pacific Gas and Electric Company. He has served on the board of PG&E Corporation since 1996, and is also a member of the board for CH2M HILL; Simpson Manufacturing Company; Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company; SLM (Sallie Mae) Corporation; and the RH Donnellet Corporation. He has taught classes in entrepreneurship at the graduate business school of the University of California, Berkeley. During his six year term on the National Park Foundation board, Williams co-

founded the African American Experience Fund. The objective of the fund is to raise money to support the National Park Foundation's African American parks and historic sites. He has also served as a U.S. delegate for the Conference on National Parks in Durbin, South Africa. In 2000, Williams became interim president and CEO of the American Management Association, the largest national provider of seminars, and a senior mediator for the Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services (JAMS).

Williams lives in the San Francisco Bay area.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Barry Williams was conducted by Loretta Henry on October 11, 2005, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Investment chief executive Barry Williams (1944 -) is the founder of Williams Pacific Ventures, Inc., a real estate and private equity investment and consulting firm. He co-founded the African American Experience Fund for the National Park Foundation, and serves as a director of the PG&E Corporation.

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:

Williams, Barry, 1944-

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Williams, Barry, 1944- --Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

African American investment advisors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Occupations:

Private Equity Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Barry Williams, October 11, 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 Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Barry Williams was born on July 21, 1944 to Ilza Berry Williams and Otis Williams in Manhattan, New York. After his maternal grandmother's early death, his mother was raised by family friends and her father, Thomas Berry, who ran the mail room at Singer Manufacturing Company in New York City. She became a teacher after attending New York City's Hunter College, where she made several friends who served as aunts to Williams. Williams' father was born in Massachusetts. He graduated from North Carolina College for Negroes, and worked as an accountant at a post office. Williams' family lived in New Bedford, Massachusetts until his parents divorced when he was twelve years old. He then moved with his mother and brothers, Otis Williams, Jr. and Keith Williams, to Mount Vernon, New York. His mother taught at a public school, and Williams and his brothers helped her tutor students at home. Williams recalls a childhood babysitter, Ma Brown, who brought him to a Pentecostal church against his Episcopal mother's wishes.

African American executives--Interviews.

African American investment advisors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Barry Williams grew up in a diverse neighborhood in Mount Vernon, New York. His family lived in a renovated carriage house with several garages that his mother rented to neighbors. He and the local children, including his friend Walter Anderson, played his backyard. His family attended St. Luke's Episcopal Church in New York City and St. Clement's Episcopal Church in Mount Vernon. Williams attended New York's P.S. 68, where his mother taught, until he transferred to Mount Vernon's Pennington-Grimes Elementary School in the second grade. He attended George Washington Junior High School for one year, and then entered a private middle school. For high school, he attended Westminster School in Connecticut, where he was influenced by his teachers Terrie McKay, Mr. Olmstead, and Mr. Burdett. His family valued education, and Williams aspired to a law career from an early age. While attending Harvard University, he spent time with family members who lived in Boston, and befriended black students from nearby schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_003, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Barry Williams befriended African American students in Boston, and was involved in the Civil Rights Movement at Harvard University where Professor Merle Fainswood served as his mentor. Williams majored in government, and worked with the school radio station and at Harvard Student Agencies. He also set the career rebound record in basketball, and played against future Senator Bill Bradley. After his graduation in 1966, Williams received the Corning Glass Fellowship, which allowed him to travel around the world for fourteen months. At its conclusion, he attended Harvard Law School and Harvard Business School, earning a dual J.D/M.B.A. degree in the first year of the joint program in 1971. Williams was then hired by McKinsey and Company in California, where he worked until 1979. He was then worked at Bechtel Group, Inc. until 1986. He

later opened his own company, Williams Pacific Ventures. Williams describes his divorce from Adrienne Foster Williams, the 1991 Oakland fire, and his interest in China.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_004, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Barry Williams received a Harvard Medal in 1979 for his work as an alumnus. In 1991, he lost his house in Oakland, California in a major fire. Although his neighborhood had been closed by police, Williams used his Pacific Gas and Electric board membership to check on his neighbors' homes. He and his sons moved into a smaller home. Williams remained involved in several business ventures, including C.N. Flagg Power, Inc. in Connecticut and rural cable companies. Williams helped African American farmers receive compensation through Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services after the 1999 Pigford v. Glickman decision, and taught a class on black entrepreneurship at Berkeley's Haas School of Business. He served as interim CEO of the American Management Association after a conflict within the board. Williams was a member of the National Park Service board, for which he and Falona Heidelberg founded the African American Experience Fund. He also produced plays with his wife, Lalita Tademey.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_005, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Barry Williams worked with the National Park Service's African American Experience Fund to raise money for eighteen parks, including an event which honored Congressman John Lewis. He also planned a reception at the Waldorf Astoria to pay tribute to General Colin L. Powell. Williams describes his entrepreneurial spirit and his desire to create institutions to help others. He talks about his enjoyment of tennis, golf and cooking, and the annual list of his favorite books that he sends to his friends. He especially enjoyed reading the works of Zadie Smith, Khaled Hosseini and Edward P. Jones. Williams often traveled with his family to places like China and Brazil. Williams describes his sons, Barry Chandler Williams, Jaime Williams, and Andrew Williams. He proposed to his wife, Lalita Tademey, on a trip to Brazil after dating her for eighteen months. In 2004, Williams held an inaugural family reunion at his home in California. He also reflects upon the importance of history.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_006, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Barry Williams and several other African American coworkers at Bechtel Group, Inc. frequently met for drinks to talk about their struggles and ideas. The gathering later became known as The Board. In 2005, he raised money for the presidential campaign of Liberian politician William Tubman, whose brother, Robert Tubman, was a friend of Williams at Harvard Law School. Williams also talks about his admiration for Nelson Mandela and further philanthropic work he would like to undertake. He describes his future plans and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He reflects upon his life, his values and his family, and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry Williams, Section A2005_240_001_007, TRT: 0:27:10 ?

Barry Williams narrates his photographs.