

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Will Gunn

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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>	Gunn, Will A. (Willie Arthur), 1958-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 26, 2013 and September 27, 2019
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013 and 2019
<b>Physical Description:</b>	13 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:11:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Military officer and defense lawyer Col. Will Gunn (1958 - ) is the first ever Chief Defense Counsel for the Department of Defense Office of Military Commissions. Gunn was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 26, 2013 and September 27, 2019, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_158
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

U.S. Air Force Colonel Will A. Gunn was born in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida in 1959. Gunn graduated with military honors with his B.S. degree in management from the United States Air Force Academy in 1980. He went on to attend Harvard Law School where he was elected president of the Harvard Law School Legal Aid Bureau and graduated cum laude with his J.D. degree in 1986. Gunn also earned his LL.M. degree in environmental law from the George Washington University School of Law. His military education included graduating from the Air Command and Staff College in 1993; the Air War College in 1999; and, Industrial College of the Armed Forces with his M.S. degree in national resource strategy in 2002.

In 1990, Gunn was appointed as a White House Fellow and Associate Director of Cabinet Affairs under President George H.W. Bush. In 2003, Gunn was named the first ever Chief Defense Counsel in the Department of Defense Office of Military Commissions. In that position, he supervised all defense activities for detainees at Guantanamo Bay prison camp selected for trial before military commissions. This was the first proceedings of this to be conducted by the United States in over sixty years. Gunn retired from the military in 2005 after more than twenty years of service and was named president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington where he led one of the largest affiliates of Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

In 2008, he founded the Gunn Law Firm to provide local representation to military members and veterans in a range of administrative matters. Returning to government in 2009, Gunn was appointed General Counsel in the Department of Veteran's Affairs. He has published articles in the *Ohio Northern Law Review* and the *Air Force Law Review*. Gunn served as chairman of the American Bar Association's Commission on Youth at Risk. In addition, he served on the boards of Christian Service Charities and the Air Force Academy Way of Life Alumni Group.

Gunn has also received numerous awards and honors including the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau's Outstanding

Alumni Award, the Human Rights Award from the Southern Center for Human Rights, and the American Bar Association's Outstanding Career Military Lawyer Award. In 2002, he was elected to the National Bar Association's Military Law Section Hall of Fame. Gunn's military honors include the Meritorious Service Medal with four oak leaf clusters and the Air Force Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster.

Colonel Will A. Gunn was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 21, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. Will Gunn was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 26, 2013 and September 27, 2019, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Military officer and defense lawyer Col. Will Gunn (1958 - ) is the first ever Chief Defense Counsel for the Department of Defense Office of Military Commissions.

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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:

Gunn, Will A. (Willie Arthur), 1958-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gunn, Will A. (Willie Arthur), 1958- --Interviews

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United States--Armed Forces--African American Officers--Interviews.

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African American lawyers--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:

Military Officer

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Defense Lawyer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|MilitaryMakers

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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 Col. Will Gunn, July 26, 2013 and September 27, 2019. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:58 ?

Will Gunn describes his family's background. His mother, Elizabeth Reese Gunn, was born on March 29, 1941 in Birmingham, Alabama. Her parents, Lula McCurdy Reese worked as a domestic, and her father, Stewart Reese, moved to Birmingham in 1920, to work in the mines, a steel mill, and later as a handyman and a yard man. Gunn's father, Willy Julian Gunn, was born on September 20, 1937, in Opelika, Alabama. He attended Darden High School, and went on to Miles College near Birmingham. Gunn's parents met in Birmingham, and got married after his mother gave birth to him at the age of seventeen. His brother, Demetrius, was born in 1960, and soon after, the family moved to Fort Lauderdale, where his father took a job as a teacher at Dillard High School. Gunn's mother completed high school later in her life, and spent her career in social services. Gunn talks about Lowndes County, Alabama, and describes his likeness to his parents, his family's summer road trip in 1967, and his earliest childhood memories.

African American families.

African American mothers--Alabama.

African American fathers--Alabama.

African American grandparents.

Childhood--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:26 ?

Will Gunn was raised in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where his parents bought a home in the Westwood Park neighborhood. Gunn talks about his childhood home and neighborhood, and his memories of growing up there. He attended Dillard Elementary School, where he performed in plays and talent shows. Gunn excelled academically, and was also involved in leadership positions in the student government. In 1970, in the seventh grade, Gunn moved to Nova Middle School in Davie, Florida, an experimental school where students were allowed to work at their own pace. Gunn also talks about his family's involvement in Greater New Mount Olive Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination and the Civil Rights Movement, and going to the segregated beach at Dania Beach, Florida as a child. He recalls his trip to Colonial Williamsburg while on a road trip with his family, where he developed an interest in becoming a lawyer.

Childhood--Florida.

Fort Lauderdale (Fla.)--Social life and custom.

Education, Primary--Florida.

African American churches--Florida.

Segregation--Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:43 ?

Will Gunn attended Piper High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he played basketball. He discusses his height, his interest in basketball, and his experience on his high school team. Gunn talks about his academics in high school, where he continued to stay involved in student government and even became the president of the student council during his senior year. During high

school, Gunn read an advertisement about the ROTC programs at armed service academies, which sparked his desire to apply to an ROTC program in college. He talks about his interest in applying to colleges such as Howard University and George Washington University. He also applied to the U.S. Air Force Academy, where he was pursued by a recruiter. Gunn talks about his decision to join the Academy when he graduated from high school in 1976. He also recalls following the Watergate hearings on television, further piquing his interest in a career in law.

Education, Secondary--Florida.

High school athletes.

College choice--United States.

United States Air Force Academy.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:34 ?

In 1976, Will Gunn was accepted into the U.S. Air Force Academy where he began his studies there three weeks after graduating from Piper High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He describes his experience there, talks about his mentors, and the influence of two instructors in particular: General Malham Wakin and Captain Curtis Martin. Gunn began to play a game called Flicker Ball at the Academy, and was recruited onto the Wing Championship Flicker Ball Team in his freshman year. While at the Academy, Gunn decided against a career as an Air Force pilot, and instead decided to pursue the Air Force Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps. He talks about careers in the Air Force besides that of a pilot. Gunn also talks about his academics at the Air Force Academy, playing basketball briefly, and becoming the class president during his sophomore year there.

United States Air Force Academy.

Mentoring.

United States. Air Force.--Judge Advocate General.

College athletes.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_005, TRT: 5:31:10 ?

In 1980, Will Gunn graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy, with a B.S. degree in management. He stayed on at the school as an admissions adviser and contract negotiator until 1981. He was then assigned to Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford, Massachusetts, as a contract negotiator. Gunn talks about the Air Force Academy's football and basketball teams, and his graduation from the Academy. In 1983, he enrolled at Harvard Law School, as part of the Air Force Funded Legal Education Program (FLEP). He describes his first impressions of Harvard University and talks about the people who inspired him to apply there. Gunn discusses his academics at Harvard Law School, his teachers and mentors there, including HistoryMaker Charles Ogletree, and his commitment to public service. While stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base, Gunn met and married his wife, Dawn, who also played a role in motivating him to apply to Harvard Law School.

United States Air Force Academy.

Hanscom AFB (Mass.)

Harvard Law School.

Ogletree, Charles J.

Marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:50 ?

Will Gunn attended Harvard Law School from 1983 to 1986, when he earned his J.D. degree. While there, he stayed involved with the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) and the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, serving as its president. Gunn reflects upon public service, practicing law, and the history of race and law in the U.S. Armed Services. Upon graduating from Harvard Law School, Gunn was appointed as Assistant Staff Judge Advocate at Mather Air Force Base in California from 1986 to 1987, and as Circuit Defense Counsel at Travis Air Force Base in California from 1988 to 1989. In 1990, Gunn was selected to serve as a White House Fellow in the Office of Cabinet Affairs at the Executive Office of the President. He talks about his experience there during President George H.W. Bush’s administration, and discusses Clarence Thomas’ controversial confirmation hearings as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Harvard Law School.

United States Armed Forces--African Americans.

Mather Air Force Base (Calif.)

Travis Air Force Base (Calif.)

Bush, George, 1924-.

Thomas, Clarence, 1948-.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_007, TRT: 7:30:02 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_008, TRT: 8:29:41 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_009, TRT: 9:30:11 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_010, TRT: 10:26:22 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_011, TRT: 11:29:52 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_012, TRT: 12:27:40 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Will Gunn, Section A2013\_158\_002\_013, TRT: 13:18:21 ?