

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Clay Evans

PERSON

Evans, Clay, Rev.

Alternative Names: Reverend Clay Evans; Rev. Dr. Clay Evans

Life Dates: June 23, 1925-November 27, 2019

Place of Birth: Brownsville, Tennessee, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Work: Chicago, IL

Occupations: Minister; Nonprofit Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Civil rights leader Reverend Clay Evans was born on June 23, 1925, in Brownsville, Tennessee to Estanualy and Henry Clay Evans. After graduating from George Washington Carver High School in Brownsville, Evans moved to Chicago to attend seminary school. He studied at the Chicago Baptist Institute, the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Evans was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1950; and, in 1958, he founded the Fellowship Baptist Church, affectionately called "The Ship" by its parishioners on the South Side. He also sang with various church choirs and wrote gospel songs, including "By and By," a 1950s hit for the Davis Sisters. In the pulpit, Evans developed a reputation as an innovative and passionate preacher. He also gained an extensive evangelical following throughout the Midwest and the South where his weekly sermons are aired on radio and television. Evans has also influenced scores of new evangelists, as over eighty ministers have studied under him. In 1965, Evans teamed up with the Reverend Jesse Jackson to start Operation PUSH, one of the country's leading civil rights organizations; and, three years later, he ordained Jackson as a minister. Between 1971 and 1976, Evans served as chairman of Operation PUSH and set direction for the group. Evans published an autobiography, *From Plough Handle to Pulpit*, in 1982, chronicling his journey from the fields of his childhood home in Tennessee to the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement. He released his first musical project in 1984, *What He's Done For Me*, and his second album in 1986, *Things Are Going to Work Out Somehow*. Evans was appointed to the International Committee of Reference in 1988, which worked to create a global ministry. He later released nine more albums: *From the Ship* (1987), *He'll Be There* (1988), *Reach Beyond the Break* (1990), *I'm Going*

Through (1993), I See A Miracle (1994), I've Got A Testimony (1996), Coming Home (1996), He's a Battle Axe (1997), and Constantly.

Evans received a 1997 Soul Train Music Awards nominations for Best Gospel Album for I've Got A Testimony. He also served as Rainbow/PUSH's national board chairman from 2008 to 2012.

Evans married Lutha Mae Hollingshed on October 15, 1946. They had five children. Evans passed away on November 27, 2019.

Evans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on January 30, 2003.

Related Entries

Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1950 to 2000]

Minister and Founder

Rainbow/PUSH [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1965 to ?]

Co-Founder

Rainbow/PUSH [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2008 to 2012]

National Board Chairman