

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Clay Evans

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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>	Evans, Clay, Rev.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 30, 2003 and July 4, 1993
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	1993 and 2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:35).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights leader Reverend Clay Evans (1925-2019) founded the Fellowship Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois in 1958 before co-founding Operation PUSH with Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1965, and later releasing eleven gospel albums. Evans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 30, 2003 and July 4, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A1993_001
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Clay Evans was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on January 30, 2003 and July 4, 1993, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights leader Reverend Clay Evans (1925-2019) founded the Fellowship Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois in 1958 before co-founding Operation PUSH with Reverend Jesse Jackson in 1965, and later releasing eleven gospel albums.

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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:

Evans, Clay, Rev.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Evans, Clay, Rev.--Interviews

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African American religious leaders--Interviews.

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African American Ministers-Interviews.

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Civil rights Activists--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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Operation PUSH (U.S.)

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## Occupations:

Minister

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Nonprofit Chief Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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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 Reverend Clay Evans, January 30, 2003 and July 4, 1993. 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_001\_001, TRT: 0:20:00 ?

Reverend Clay Evans described the influential Civil Rights ministers and leaders who helped shape his career and his ministry, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., Dr. Louis Rawls, Reverend Clarence H. Cobbs, Reverend Louis Boddie, and Reverend C. J. Rogers. Evans then talked about the role the church has played in the black community. He attributed the success of the Civil Rights Movement to the institution of the church in the black community. Then, Evans reflected on the impact the Civil Rights Movement had on the black community and on American society as a whole. Lastly, Evans described that he attributes his success to his spirituality and ministry.

African American Ministers.

African American civil rights leaders.

African American religious leaders--Interviews.

Spirituality.

Civil rights--Religious aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_001\_002, TRT: 0:02:30 ?

Reverend Clay Evans described that he would like to be remembered as man with integrity.

Integrity.

African American leadership.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_002\_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Reverend Clay Evans was born on June 23, 1925 in Brownsville, Tennessee to Henry Clay Evans and Estanuly Evans. His parents were sharecroppers in Tennessee, raising their nine children, working on a white farmer's land. His father also dug wells around the countryside, and Evans often helped. Evans described his mother, Estanuly Evans, as resourceful, religious, and more educated than most African Americans he grew up with, finishing the eighth grade. His parents were Baptists, and Evans enjoyed attending Woodlawn Baptist Church in Brownsville, Tennessee and singing in the choir. His maternal grandfather was General Estes and his paternal grandfather was Tom Evans, who Evans remembers as being devoted to his family. Evans describes growing up very poor in rural Tennessee, where he experienced racism and hostility as a black youth in the Jim Crow Era South.

Sharecroppers--Tennessee.

African American Baptists--Tennessee--Brownsville.

African American families--Tennessee--Brownsville.

African American children--Social life and customs--Tennessee.

African American grandparents--Tennessee--Brownsville.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_002\_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Reverend Clay Evans grew up in Brownsville, Tennessee in the 1920s and 1930s, where he experienced violence and racism. In Brownsville in 1940, Elbert Williams was lynched when he tried to set up a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Evans attended a make-shift school out of Woodlawn Baptist Church in Brownsville, Tennessee, and then he attended Carver High School where he graduated at age twenty-one in 1945. He was a poor student and a slow learner, though he was active in choir and at Woodlwan Baptist Church. After high school graduation, Evans moved to Chicago, Illinois to escape the violence and discrimination he faced living in the South. He initially wanted to become an undertaker, but he felt called to become a preacher. Evans then entered the Chicago Baptist Institute; and he met and married his wife, Lutha May Evans, in 1945 at their church, the Reverend Dr. Louis Rawls' Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois.

African American leadership.

Vocation--Baptists, [Catholic Church, etc.]

African Americans--Education--Tennessee.

Racism.

African American children--Tennessee--Brownsville.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_002\_005, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Reverend Clay Evans attended seminary at the Chicago Baptist Institute in 1946. In 1950, he started the Fellowship Baptist Church on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. Evans grew his congregation through a broadcast out of Gary, Indiana's TV station WYCA. He was influenced by Revered Clarence H. Cobbs and Reverend Louis Boddie in building his congregation. In 1961, he attended the National Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, when the Progressive National Baptist Convention was formed and dissent arose around the Civil Rights Movement. Evans remained with the original Convention, though he worked with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the Civil Rights Movement. During the 1960s, Evans became involved with HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Operation Breadbasket. He also worked with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. when he came to Chicago in 1964 and was involved in the Chicago Freedom Movement and the Open Housing Movement.

African American leadership.

African Americans--Religion.

African American churches--Illinois--Chicago.

African American college students--Illinois--Chicago.

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_002\_006, TRT:

0:30:20 ?

Reverend Clay Evans worked with HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. throughout the 1960s and 1970s in the Chicago Freedom Movement and Civil Rights Movement, where they worked together on Operation Breadbasket. When Dr. Martin Luther King came to Chicago in 1964, Evans worked with him on the Open Housing Movement, and introduced him at the rally held at Soldier Field in 1966. In 1971, Evans and HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. founded Operation PUSH, later the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, and Evans served as its chairman of the board from 1971 to 1976. He developed a close relationship to HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., and ordained him in 1968. In 1968, Evans marched in the funeral of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta, Georgia. That year, he also worked on the Poor People's Campaign in Washington D.C. Then, Evans describes his religious philosophy and his hopes and concerns for the black community. He then describes how he would like to be remembered.

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.

Civil rights movements--Illinois--Chicago.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Soldier Field (Chicago, Ill.).

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_002\_007, TRT: 0:13:15 ?

Reverend Clay Evans narrates his photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Clay Evans, Section A1993\_001\_AUDIO\_001, TRT: