Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Muwakkil, Salim

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil,

Dates: March 10, 2003

Bulk Dates: 2003

Physical Description: 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:48:30).

Abstract: Magazine editor and newspaper columnist Salim Muwakkil (1947 - ) worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Development and was also a freelance writer for several publications. In 1984, he became the senior editor of, In These Times. Muwakkil was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 10, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2003_040

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist and political commentator Salim Muwakkil was born on January 20, 1947, in New York City. Given the birth name of Alonzo Canady, Jr., he was the oldest of four children born to Alonzo Canady and Bertha Merriman. He attended Linden High School in Linden, New Jersey, graduating in 1964. Upon graduation, he enrolled in the U.S. Air Force, serving five years as an administration specialist.

After the completion of his Air Force service in 1969, Muwakkil returned to New
Jersey and enrolled at Rutgers University, where he earned a B.A. in political science in 1973. Shortly before graduating, he started working as a news writer for the Associated Press' bureau in Newark. The following year he became the copy editor for Muhammad Speaks-Bilalian News, the largest black-owned publication in the country. During his time there, which lasted until July 1977, he also became the managing editor of the newspaper, and in 1975 officially changed his name.

By 1980, Muwakkil was living in Chicago, working as a writer and editor for the U.S. Department of Housing and Development. He was also serving as a freelance writer, contributing to various publications such as the New York Times and Washington Post. In 1984, he became the senior editor of In These Times. Muwakkil later became a contributing columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times and the Chicago Tribune. He has also served as host of the “Salim Muwakkil Show” on WVON-AM since 2007.

Muwakkil is the author of Harold!, a book chronicling Harold Washington’s historic tenure as mayor of Chicago. He has also contributed to five other books and has been a frequent guest on Chicago Tonight, a public affairs program, and on Beyond the Beltway, a nationally syndicated political radio program. He has provided political commentary for various other radio and television shows, served as an adjunct professor at the Art Institute of Chicago and Northwestern University, and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. Muwakkil is married and the father of two children. He resides in Chicago.

Salim Muwakkil was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 10, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Salim Muwakkil was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 10, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Magazine editor and newspaper columnist Salim Muwakkil (1947 - ) worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Development and was also a freelance writer for several publications. In 1984, he became the senior editor of, In These Times.

Restrictions on Access
Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of 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.

**Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Persons:**

Muwakkil, Salim

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews
Muwakkil, Salim --Interviews

**Organizations:**
Occupations:

Magazine Editor

Newspaper Columnist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil was born as Alonzo James Cannady on January 20, 1947 to Bertha Merriman and Alonzo Cannady in Harlem, New York. His mother was born on August 19, 1930 in New York City, New York and was the daughter of William Dotson and Alice Taylor, who migrated to New York from Florida. Bertha Merriman worked in the post office and sang with Count Basie at the nearby Woodside Hotel. Muwakkil’s father, Alonzo Cannady, was born in June 1924 in Clearwater, Florida and grew up in Harlem, New York. Cannady served as a medic in the U.S. Army during World War II and worked as a nurse. Muwakkil learned later of an ancestor called the “Guinea Sultan” who lived on the Gullah/Geechee Islands and practiced Islam. Muwakkil’s parents separated when he was five, but he remained close to both of them. Although he moved from Harlem to New Jersey when he was eleven after his grandmother remarried, he travelled regularly to Harlem to hear Malcolm X speak, visit jazz clubs, and hear poets like Amiri Baraka at Café Wha.

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil attended St. Charles Borromeo in New York City and Linden High School in Linden New Jersey, where he played football and sang in the doo-wop groups The Beltones and The Prides. Muwakkil attended the March on Washington and was present at the Harlem riot in June of 1964, when his cousin was shot by a police officer. After he graduated from high school in 1964,
Muwakkil enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed in Germany, where he deciphered Morse code from foreign intelligence. In 1967, he was reassigned to Robins Air Force Base in Georgia, where he demonstrated against the military after the shooting of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was shot by a motel owner in 1968 and discharged from the U.S. Air Force in February of 1969, after which he joined the Black Panther Party. Muwakkil left the Black Panthers in 1970 and joined the Nation of Islam. The same year, he also enrolled at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_003, TRT: 0:28:45 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil wrote for the Associated Press and Muhammad Speaks, often writing the same story with different perspectives for both newspapers. He received his B.A. degree from Rutgers University in January 1973 and moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1974 after receiving a call from Elijah Muhammad. Muwakkil worked at Muhammad Speaks under editors John Woodford and Askia Muhammad, where he wrote under the name “Alonzo 4X.” In 1975, Muwakkil traveled to Uganda with HistoryMaker Minister Louis Farrakhan after Idi Amin was made head of the Organization of African Unity. While they were in Uganda, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad died, creating anxiety within the Nation of Islam concerning whether his successor would be Minister Farrakhan or Wallace Muhammad. Under Wallace Muhammad’s leadership, “Muhammad Speaks” was changed to the “Bilalian News” and featured more popular culture. Muwakkil describes the dynamics within the Nation of Islam during that time and his decision to leave the paper in 1977.

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_004, TRT: 0:29:35 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil was a freelance writer from 1977 until 1983 for publications including the Chicago Reader, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. During this time, Muwakkil's columns focused on “debunking” and critiquing leaders and ideologies within the Civil Rights Movement that he felt were limiting art and creativity. He
reflects on the media’s treatment of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army. In 1980, Muwakkil was a writer and editor for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In 1983, Muwakkil wrote an article on HistoryMakers Minister Louis Farrakhan and Reverend Jesse Jackson that was picked up by a magazine named “In These Times.” With In These Times, Muwakkil wrote stories that contextualized African American politics, such as the 1983 election of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and Reverend Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. During this time, Muwakkil became disenchanted with both doctrinated Marxism and the popularity of the black nationalist movements.

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_005, TRT: 0:28:25 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil became senior editor of In These Times newspaper in 1984, where he advocated for the alternative press and progressive politics. In the early 1990s, he was on a nationally syndicated radio program called “Beyond the Beltway” with Republican Tom Roeser when the two of them were asked to join the Chicago Sun-Times by Mark Hornung. Muwakkil started writing for the Sun-Times in 1993 and continued writing weekly or twice weekly columns until 1997, when the paper was purchased by the conservative Conrad Black of the Hollinger Corporation. In 1998, Muwakkil was offered a bi-weekly column in the Chicago Tribune, which became a weekly column in January 1999. Muwakkil wrote this column until February 2003, when three articles he wrote criticizing the Iraq War caused controversy at the paper. Muwakkil reflects on his readers’ outpouring of appreciation after his column’s cancellation. He also reflects on the importance of education and of helping reintegrate the incarcerated population into normal life.

Video Oral History Interview with Salim Muwakkil, Section A2003_040_001_006, TRT: 0:22:55 2003/03/10

Salim Muwakkil discusses his political concerns for the African American community including its high incarceration rate, the legalization of drugs, and the Iraq War. Muwakkil was a media fellow for George Soros' Open Society Institute, where he wrote about criminal
justice issues such as the murder of an Amer-I-Can leader in the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. Muwakkil reflects upon his regrets, his plans for the future, and his legacy. He ends the interview by narrating his photographs.