

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with N. Don Wycliff

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wycliff, Don, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff,
Dates:	July 2, 2003 and March 17, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:42:54).
Abstract:	Newspaper columnist and newspaper editor N. Don Wycliff (1946 -) was an award-winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune. Wycliff was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 2, 2003 and March 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_050
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper editor and columnist N. Don Wycliff was born in Liberty, Texas on December 17, 1946. Driven by the dearth of employment and educational opportunities for African Americans in Texas, Wycliff's parents moved their family to Kentucky in 1954. Wycliff graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1969. While attending graduate school on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship at the University of Chicago, Wycliff was riveted by local news organizations' coverage of a police raid on the Black Panthers' headquarters on the West Side. Deciding on journalism as a career, Wycliff returned to Texas and accepted a position as a general assignment reporter at the *Houston Post*.

Wycliff worked as a reporter in Ohio, Illinois, and Washington, before becoming region section editor and assistant to the editor at the *New York Times: Week in Review*. As a board member of the *Times'* editorial page from 1985 to 1990, Wycliff addressed an array of issues, including religion, race relations, social policy, and education. Wycliff joined the *Chicago Tribune's* editorial staff in 1990; under his leadership, the paper won numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize and two Distinguished Writing Awards from the American Society of Newspaper Editors. A member of the Chicago Journalism Hall of Fame, Wycliff received writing awards and evaluated others' work for the Pulitzer Prize and other honors.

From 2000 on, Wycliff worked as a *Tribune* columnist and the newspaper's public editor; fielding comments about its reporting, writing, and editing. In these positions, Wycliff unflinchingly reflected on variety of topics; advocating objectivity and justice. Wycliff served on advisory councils at Notre Dame and Northwestern universities, and at the national associations of minority media executives and black journalists. In Evanston, Illinois, where he lived with his wife, Catherine, and sons Matthew and Grant, Wycliff served as a Cub Scout leader, sports coach, and member of St. Mary's church Parish Pastoral Council.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with N. Don Wycliff was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 2, 2003 and March 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist and newspaper editor N. Don Wycliff (1946 -) was an award-winning journalist for the Chicago Tribune.

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:

Wycliff, Don, 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wycliff, Don, 1946---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago tribune.

Occupations:

Newspaper Columnist

Newspaper Editor

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, July 2, 2003 and March 17, 2003. 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 N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_001_001, TRT: 0:29:59 ?
Journalist Don Wycliff gives his family background and describes his environment while growing up in Dayton, Texas. Wycliff shares many stories about his great-grandparents and grandparents, as well as sharing details about his mother's upbringing.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_001_002, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff talks about his father's background and shares details about his father's life and childhood. Wycliff shares more memories of his childhood, explaining his family's move from Texas to Kentucky. Wycliff also discusses his early exposure to the media.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_001_003, TRT: 0:30:52 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff shares stories of his upbringing in Texas, Kentucky, Colorado and Indiana. He recalls his school and home life in these varied locations. After moving to Indiana during the middle of his high school career, Wycliff talks about earning a scholarship to Notre Dame University. Wycliff details his college life, describing his feelings of isolation as one of twenty-five black students among 7,000 white students. Wycliff explains how professors at Notre Dame encouraged him to attend the University of Chicago on scholarship to pursue his Ph.D. He also explains how the killing of Fred Hampton and other Black Panthers inspired him to become a journalist.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_001_004, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff continues to explain how the media coverage of the Black Panther Shootout in 1969 compelled him to pursue a career in journalism. After rejections at Texas television stations, Wycliff describes landing a job at the Houston Post newspaper. After successful stints at other Texas papers, Wycliff talks about moving to Chicago to work at the Chicago Daily News with Lu Palmer. When the Daily News folded in 1978, Wycliff moved to Seattle to work at the Post Intelligencer, a move he now regrets. He worked his way back across the United States, and a fortuitous recommendation from a former coworker led to a new job at the New York Times. Wycliff describes the day-to-day culture at the Times.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_002_005, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff offers his thoughts on the high-pressure atmosphere of the New York Times Editorial Board. As only the third black person to serve on the prestigious Board, Wycliff explains how he had to adapt to the Board's culture, yet not be intimidated by the powerful Board members. Wycliff also shares insight into the role politics plays in making editorial decisions and some conflicts he encountered because of his political beliefs. The segment closes with Wycliff landing the story of his life, covering Nelson Mandela after his release from prison and how that story led to him taking a competing offer from the Chicago Tribune.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_002_006, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff discusses a variety of subjects he covered at the Chicago Tribune, from school vouchers, to "No Child Left Behind", to the firing of Op-Ed columnist Salim Muwakkil. Wycliff also discusses the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Chicago Tribune and some of the controversy that coverage generates for him as the Public Editor. Wycliff also comments on the moderate conservative politics of the Tribune despite its place in a Democratic city.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_002_007, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Journalist Don Wycliff comments on the recent firing of controversial Chicago Tribune op-ed columnist Salim Muwakkil. He describes the difficulties of being the Editorial Page editor, which frequently comes in the form of an editorial cartoon. Wycliff comments on life as a one of the few of black journalists at the Tribune and other major newspapers. He shares the joys of being a decision maker on the New York Times and Chicago Tribune Editorial boards. In closing, he offers his hopes for the future of the black community. Wycliff then

narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.

Video Oral History Interview with N. Don Wycliff, Section A2003_050_002_008, TRT: 0:10:41 ?

Don Wycliff narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.