

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gwendolyn Mitchell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Mitchell, Gwendolyn A. (Gwendolyn Ann), 1955-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell,
Dates:	April 1, 2004 and December 18, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003 and 2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:58:35).
Abstract:	Book editor Gwendolyn Mitchell (1955 -) served as editor of Third World Press, where she managed one of the leading independent African American publishers in the nation. She is the author of House of Women, Veins and Rivers, and Ain't I Black, and has co-edited two anthologies of creative writing. Mitchell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 1, 2004 and December 18, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_304
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Editor and poet Gwendolyn Ann Mitchell was born December 27, 1955, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, growing up in Pittsburgh. The daughter of a teacher and a pioneering black police commander, Mitchell attended Lemington Elementary School, Westinghouse High School, and graduated from Allendale High School in 1973. Moving to Dallas, Texas, she was hired as a sales clerk and was promoted to department manager at Neiman Marcus Department Store between the years of

1977 and 1987. Mitchell earned a B.A. in political science from Penn State University in 1988 and a M.F.A. in English poetry in 1991. In 1996, She earned a certificate in arts management from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Between 1989 and 1993, Mitchell worked as a lecturer in Penn State's English and women's studies departments, and in 1994, she became a staff assistant to Pennsylvania Senator Harris Wofford in Pittsburgh. She worked for Youth Enrichment Services and the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts in Pittsburgh before moving to Chicago to become Editor of Third World Press in 1997. Working closely with Third World Press founder Haki Madhubuti, Mitchell manages one of the leading independent African American publishers in the nation, whose published authors include Chancellor Williams, Dudley Randall, Jacob Carruthers, Sonia Sanchez, Bakari Kitwana, Useni Eugene Perkins, Sterling Plumpp, Carolyn Rodgers, the late poet laureate Gwendolyn Brooks, Haki Madhubuti, and Gwendolyn Mitchell herself. Mitchell's latest work, *House of Women*, reviewed by Gwendolyn Brooks, was published in 2002.

Mitchell is also the author of *Veins and Rivers*, and a book length poem, *Ain't I Black*. She has co-edited two anthologies of creative writing. Mitchell now lives in Chicago with her son, Sankara.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 1, 2004 and December 18, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Book editor Gwendolyn Mitchell (1955 -) served as editor of Third World Press, where she managed one of the leading independent African American publishers in the nation. She is the author of *House of Women*, *Veins and Rivers*, and *Ain't I Black*, and has co-edited two anthologies of creative writing.

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:

Mitchell, Gwendolyn A. (Gwendolyn Ann), 1955-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Mitchell, Gwendolyn A. (Gwendolyn Ann), 1955---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Book 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 Gwendolyn Mitchell, April 1, 2004 and December 18, 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 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).

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 Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section A2003_304_001_001, TRT: 0:31:31 2003/12/18

Gwendolyn Mitchell was born on December 27, 1955 in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania to Herman Mitchell, Jr. and Franzelle Mitchell. Mitchell traces her maternal ancestry to her great-grandmother, Frances, who was enslaved on a Georgia plantation. After the Civil War, Mitchell's ancestors moved from Georgia to Texas. Like many of Mitchell's maternal relatives, her grandfather, Walter S. Mitchell, Sr., was an educator. Her mother was born in Cass County, Texas; her father was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her paternal ancestors likely migrated to Pennsylvania while under the employment of the Heinz family. Mitchell's paternal great-grandfather, John Poe, also sold household goods as a street vendor. Her paternal grandfather, Herman Mitchell, Sr., was a postman who graduated from Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh. Mitchell describes her parents' courtship and her father's near-death experience. Mitchell's mother worked as a home economics teacher after graduating from Bishop College in Marshall, Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section A2003_304_001_002, TRT: 0:30:14 2003/12/18

Gwendolyn Mitchell describes her mother's personality. Mitchell's father, Herman Mitchell, Jr., was raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's East Liberty section and hired at the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police where he worked to improve conditions for African American and female police officers as a founding member of the Guardians of Greater Pittsburgh. He retired as a commander and as head of the community policing department after thirty years. Mitchell remembers the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as one of eight children. Her family regularly attended Rodham Street Missionary Baptist Church where Mitchell and her siblings would sing as a family. A quiet child, Mitchell

enjoyed trips to the YMCA and the library. She believes she inherited her love of poetry from her grandmother. She attended Lemington Elementary and then Westinghouse High School until her family moved from Pittsburgh's East Liberty Section to New Homestead, a historically black community in the city.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section A2003_304_001_003, TRT: 0:30:35 2003/12/18

Gwendolyn Mitchell describes Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania's three historically black communities: New Homestead, The Hill District, and East Liberty. After her family moved to New Homestead in 1971, she attended Allderdice High School. She remembers popular music and her family's singing group. In 1973, Mitchell enrolled at Pennsylvania State University Beaver Campus in Monaca, Pennsylvania before transferring to the University's main campus in State College where she participated in the Black Student Union and pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. Before graduating, she travelled to Dallas, Texas where she stayed for ten years, working at Neiman Marcus and becoming a member of the Afro-American Artists Alliance. She was also a coordinator for the Harambee Festival. Mitchell then returned to Penn State University, receiving her B.A. degree in 1988; and her M.F.A. in 1991. At Penn State, Mitchell's writing was shaped by Bruce Weigl, John Balaban, and Carolyn Forche. She also talks about her marriage and her son.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section A2003_304_002_004, TRT: 0:30:10 2004/04/01

Gwendolyn Mitchell was a teaching assistant and a lecturer in English and women's studies at Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania after graduating from the University with an M.F.A. in 1991. Mitchell began to work for U.S. Senator Harris Wofford as a staff assistant in 1993, advocating on behalf of veterans and African American's in Senator Wofford's constituency, and coordinating with the Veterans Administration (VA) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to help community members with housing and employment concerns. She describes Wofford's

personality and his work in the Civil Rights Movement. After Wofford lost his seat in the “Republican Revolution” of 1994, Mitchell lost her job and renewed her focus on writing. She talks about HistoryMaker Haki Madhubuti and her decision to join Third World Press as an editor in 1997. One of Mitchell’s early projects at Third World Press was HistoryMaker Derrick Bell’s “Afrolantica Legacies.” She describes her responsibilities as an editor.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section
A2003_304_002_005, TRT: 0:31:15 2004/04/01

Gwendolyn Mitchell’s projects as an editor at Third World Press include HistoryMaker Derrick Bell’s “Afrolantica Legacies” and HistoryMaker Julianne Malveaux’s “The Paradox of Loyalty.” Mitchell describes the Press’ dedication to publishing poetry. One of Third World Press’ core poets was Gwendolyn Brooks; the press published Brooks’ final work, “In Montgomery.” Mitchell reflects on her memories of Brooks. She also talks about the While there were not many open submissions to Third World Press, all submissions were considered for publication. Mitchell describes the history of Third World Press and its development over the years. Some of Mitchell’s published works as a poet include “Ain’t I Black” and “House of Women,” from which she recites the title poem. Mitchell also talks about Third World Press’ sister organizations including the Institute of Positive Education and the Betty Shabazz International Charter School.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Mitchell, Section
A2003_304_002_006, TRT: 0:24:50 2004/04/01

Gwendolyn Mitchell describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She also reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered. Mitchell concludes by narrating her personal photographs.