

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Randolph Michael McLaughlin

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Scott-McLaughlin, Randolph M. |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin, |
| Dates: | July 29, 2005 and June 8, 2005 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2005 |
| Physical Description: | 9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:16:35). |
| Abstract: | Civil rights lawyer Randolph Michael McLaughlin (1953 -) has served as the executive director of Hale House in New York, and has represented African Americans against the Ku Klux Klan and challenging electoral district laws. He has also served as the director of the Social Justice Center at Pace University Law School. McLaughlin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 29, 2005 and June 8, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2005_130 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights attorney and executive director of Hale House Randolph McLaughlin was born on June 9, 1953 in East Elmhurst, New York. During his early school years attending P. S. 148 in the mid 1960s, his favorite teacher Ms. Oliveri, chose him to deliver the "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King during a school play. After that moment, McLaughlin made a personal decision to dedicate his life to civil rights and the struggle against injustice. He graduated Newtown

High School in 1967.

After four years of undergraduate work at Columbia University in 1975, McLaughlin was admitted to Harvard Law School and upon graduation from law school in 1978 joined the staff of the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York City and was mentored by William Kunstler.

Beginning his civil rights legal career in 1982, McLaughlin represented five African American women in a major lawsuit against the Chattanooga branch of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The women were awarded \$535,000 in damages and McLaughlin started a long career in civil rights law. On March 13, 1991, McLaughlin represented Ossie Davis and others in a federal class action challenge against the at-large election system utilized by the City of New Rochelle, New York for the election of its City Council members. As a result on March 2, 1993 a referendum was held and approved leading to the City Council approving a six-district plan. On November 2, 1993, under the new district plan, the first African American woman was elected to the City Council of New Rochelle.

In 1988, McLaughlin joined the faculty of Pace University School of Law where he began to teach Civil Rights Law and Civil Rights Litigation. In 1992, he was honored as the Outstanding Professor of the Year. Four years later in 1996, McLaughlin was appointed as the director of Pace Law School Social Justice Center. The Social Justice Center saved a vibrant community in New Rochelle, New York from displacement by an IKEA super store.

Since May of 2001, McLaughlin has served as counsel to the Board of Directors of Hale House Center, which was founded by Clara "Mother" Hale in 1969. In the fall of 2004, the Board of Directors appointed McLaughlin as the executive director of Hale House, where he continues to serve the community.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin was conducted by Shawn Wilson on July 29, 2005 and June 8, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Randolph Michael McLaughlin (1953 -) has served as the executive director of Hale House in New York, and has represented African Americans against the Ku Klux Klan and challenging electoral district laws. He has also served as the director of the Social Justice Center at Pace University Law School.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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:

Scott-McLaughlin, Randolph M.

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Randolph Michael McLaughlin, July 29, 2005 and June 8, 2005. 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

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 Randolph Michael McLaughlin, Section A2005_130_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 2005/06/08

Randolph Michael McLaughlin was born on June 9, 1953 in New York City to Mae Rodrigues and Joseph McLaughlin. His mother was born in 1906 in Kingston, Jamaica and immigrated with her family to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after her father died. Her mother, Pauline Pommels, had white and African ancestry, and her father was descended from Portuguese Jews who opened a clothing store in Kingston called the People's Bazaar. McLaughlin's father was born on the island of Roatan in Honduras to a father of Irish descent and a mother who was indigenous Central American. McLaughlin's father, a jack of all trades, knew Augusto Sandino personally, and spoke to the revolutionary before he was killed in Nicaragua. McLaughlin grew up in New York City with his brother, Victor McLaughlin, parents, and maternal grandmother. During family visits to Jamaica, he hunted birds and bathed outdoors. In describing his appreciation for his diverse lineage, McLaughlin also explains why he identifies as African American.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin, Section A2005_130_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2005/06/08

Randolph Michael McLaughlin spent holidays with his large extended family. He had a strict upbringing in the black middle-class neighborhood of East Elmhurst in New

York City. Malcolm X lived nearby, and McLaughlin saw his home after it was firebombed. Louis Armstrong lived in a neighboring community. McLaughlin remembers smelling curry goat and hearing his father watch baseball games on TV. He enjoyed collecting Marvel comic books. In third grade, McLaughlin was sent to P.S. 148, a white school in nearby Jackson Heights, for its gifted program. His first teacher at this school expelled him from the gifted class, but his second teacher inspired him with lessons about the Civil Rights Movement. In a class performance, McLaughlin played Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech. When he was in sixth grade, the public schools were integrated, and he returned to P.S. 127, his original elementary school in East Elmhurst.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 2005/06/08

Randolph Michael McLaughlin dreamed of becoming a lawyer at a young age. His mother, a seamstress at garment factories in midtown Manhattan, belonged to the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. His father, who worked at Flushing Hospital, took him to the first hospital strike and urged him to pursue a white-collar career. McLaughlin shuffled between advanced and regular classes at Newtown High School until he decided to work harder, which led him to excel academically. His occasional demotions from honors classes taught him the value of humility. As a young man, he ran track and participated in Boys State, a mock government organization for teenagers, which allowed him to travel to Upstate New York. As a teenager, he became politicized and joined a few anti-war demonstrations, but he also heeded a teacher’s advice to keep a low profile for his own safety. At Columbia University, McLaughlin studied African history and literature and prepared for law school.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_001_004, TRT: 0:30:40 2005/06/08

Randolph Michael McLaughlin was initially reluctant to accept his admission to Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts due to concerns about his mother’s failing health. With her blessing, McLaughlin

entered Harvard Law School in 1975. Determined to break out of his shell while there, he worked hard and spoke out during his classes. While the *DeFunis v. Odegaard*, 1974 and *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 1978 cases were being argued before the U.S. Supreme Court, McLaughlin had to defend himself against false assumptions about minority students and affirmative action. He struggled to stay true to his political beliefs and interests while being pressured to enter the corporate arena, and was inspired by attorney William Kunstler to pursue civil rights law. His most memorable class was with the strict and intimidating Arthur R. Miller, whose high standards later inspired McLaughlin's approach when he taught at Pace Law School in White Plains, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_002_005, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/07/29

Randolph Michael McLaughlin was inspired by William Kunstler's defense of the Chicago Seven in 1968, and met his idol at Harvard University after the trial. He secured a job with Jack Greenberg and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund during his second summer at Harvard Law School. After graduating in 1978, McLaughlin was hired at the Center for Constitutional Rights, making him the center's second African American lawyer. He worked under Morten Stavis on *Dellinger vs. Mitchell*, 1971, suing the government on behalf of the Chicago Seven activists who Kunstler defended. While the suit was unsuccessful, McLaughlin explains that their intention was to raise consciousness rather than to win the case. In 1981, McLaughlin worked with Kunstler and C. Vernon Mason to defend former Black Panther Party members Bashir Hameed and Abdul Majid. During the trial, Kunstler directed McLaughlin as he cross-examined a witness for the first time. McLaughlin describes a courtroom tactic he used to gain the jury's favor.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_002_006, TRT: 0:30:17 2005/07/29

Randolph Michael McLaughlin recalls a tactic to influence the jury that he used while representing Bashir Hameed and Abdul Majid in 1981. After C. Vernon Mason left the case, McLaughlin worked closely with William Kunstler,

learning much from his idol. During the second trial, the judge unfairly dismissed the jury when it appeared that McLaughlin's clients might be acquitted. The judge in the third trial was clearly biased against the defendants, who were found guilty. With the Center for Constitutional Rights, McLaughlin marched against the Ku Klux Klan in Decatur, Alabama, and helped coordinate a rally in Greensboro, North Carolina, despite resistance from the mayor. In 1984, McLaughlin worked with George Key to file a suit against the Chattanooga, Tennessee chapter of the KKK after five African American women were attacked. He chose not to keep a gun for self-protection while living in Chattanooga during the trial. McLaughlin describes a large mural of slavery that hung in the courtroom.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_002_007, TRT: 0:30:20 2005/07/29

Randolph Michael McLaughlin worked closely with attorney Victor McTeer in the lawsuit of Crumsey v. Justice Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Chattanooga, Tennessee. During jury selection, the defense team disqualified all but one black juror. Nonetheless, McLaughlin and McTeer won thousands of dollars in damages for the five women they represented. With the Center for Constitutional Rights, McLaughlin worked on a school desegregation case in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and two civil rights cases in Mississippi. In reaction to the 1979 Rice Riots, McLaughlin was recruited to conduct a human rights investigation in Liberia. His findings at the end of his study correctly predicted further unrest and violence. McLaughlin talks about the conclusions of his study and the civil war that followed. He describes the history of Liberia, and the country's unique connection to the United States, as well as the foods of Liberia and his first taste of palm wine.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_002_008, TRT: 0:30:56 2005/07/29

Randolph Michael McLaughlin describes the civil war in Liberia that erupted after his human rights investigation. McLaughlin worked with HistoryMaker Basil Paterson at a law firm in Long Island, New York for two years before

accepting a teaching job at Pace University of Law in White Plains, New York. As a professor, he sought to emulate Charles Hamilton Houston. McLaughlin continued to practice law, focusing on Westchester County. He took on a voting rights case in Hempstead, New York in 1988 that resulted in the election of the town's first African American councilwoman. The following year, McLaughlin was contacted by the NAACP to represent Ossie Davis in a similar case in New Rochelle, New York. He worked on creating the county's first civilian review board, successfully fought for equality in the Yonkers school district, and prevented the displacement of New Rochelle residents. In the face of a management scandal, Hale House Center brought McLaughlin in as part of a team to reform the institution.

Video Oral History Interview with Randolph Michael McLaughlin,
Section A2005_130_002_009, TRT: 0:16:12 2005/07/29

Randolph Michael McLaughlin helped reform Hale House Center by hiring a new administration and serving as counsel to the board. In 2004, he became interim director, and was afterwards promoted to executive director. Under his leadership, Hale House worked closely with the City of New York and launched a new program to address the problem of abandoned infants. McLaughlin reflects upon his life, naming his case against the Ku Klux Klan and his human rights report in Liberia as his proudest accomplishments. He considers the impact of his report and the importance of history. McLaughlin explains his motivation to be interviewed by The HistoryMakers, and, in reflecting upon his legacy, offers advice on how to live a fulfilling life.