

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Richard G. Womack

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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>	Womack, Richard G., 1939-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 29, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:10:47).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Executive assistant Richard G. Womack (1939 - ) served as assistant to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, as well as a member of the NAACP's Board of Directors. Womack was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 29, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_155
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Richard Gilbert Womack, assistant to American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) President John Sweeney, was born on November 18, 1939, in Danville, Virginia. Soon after his birth, Womack moved with his parents, Louise Patrick and Gilbert Womack, to Darby Township outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he attended public school, graduating from Darby High School in 1957. After graduation, Womack served in the United States Army in Fort Lee, Virginia, and in 1962, took a job with Reynolds Aluminum that ultimately launched his career with the AFL-CIO.

Womack performed various functions within the AFL-CIO, including holding a position as assistant director of the Human Resources Development Institute in 1971, and serving as director of the Department of Civil Rights in 1986. In 2003, Womack became the assistant to the AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, advising him on civil, human, and women's rights, immigration issues, and overseeing outreach to community and religious organizations.

While serving the AFL-CIO, Womack also served as a member of the NAACP's Board of Directors, chairing the National Board of Director's Labor Committee; Chairman of the Board of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation; and as the acting executive director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Womack received a presidential appointment in January of 1996 to the board of the Federal Prison Industries.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Richard G. Womack was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 29, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Executive assistant Richard G. Womack (1939 - ) served as assistant to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, as well as a member of the NAACP's Board of Directors.

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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:

Womack, Richard G., 1939-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghilea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Womack, Richard G., 1939---Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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Labor unions--United States--Officials and employees--Interviews

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African American labor leaders--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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## **Occupations:**

Association Chief Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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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 Richard G. Womack, June 29, 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 standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **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 Richard G. Womack, Section  
A2005\_155\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:24 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack was born on November 18, 1989 to Louise Patrick Womack and Gilbert Womack in Danville, Virginia. His father was born in Rifeville, Virginia, where his family farmed. In addition to farming, Womack's father was a Pentecostal minister and was well-respected in his community. Womack's mother was also born and raised in Virginia. Her family members were farm owners who grew tobacco and watermelons. When Womack was three years old, she passed away. As a result, Womack and his sister and brother were raised by her sister, Carrie Patrick Irving, in Darby Township, a rural, segregated community in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. Womack remembers his experiences of racism and segregation in both the South and the North. While visiting family in Rifeville, he was refused counter service at a drugstore, unless he remained standing. He also describes the plight of an African American man who decided to move into a majority-white neighborhood in Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Labor unions--United States--Officials and employees--Interviews.

African American labor leaders--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section  
A2005\_155\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:22 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack was raised by his maternal aunt, Carrie Patrick Irving, in Darby Township, Pennsylvania during his early childhood. In nearby Glenolden, Pennsylvania, Womack attended Darby Township School, a majority-black school, where he was known for defending children from bullies. He skipped the first grade to be in his older sister's classes, and enjoyed math. After

Womack's father recovered from the death of Womack's mother, Womack returned to his father's home in Darby Township. There, his father served as the assistant pastor of a Pentecostal church. In addition to church activities, Womack played basketball, baseball and football as a student at Darby Township High School, an integrated school. He remembers classes like woodshop and physical education. Upon graduating in 1959, Womack briefly attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida, where he played football. However, due to illness, he returned home and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section A2005\_155\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:09 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack enlisted in the U.S. Army after briefly playing defensive end for Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's football team. While stationed in Fort Lee, Virginia, Womack played basketball and football with his company and worked as an office clerk. He organized fellow black soldiers to prevent the company from vacationing in segregated Virginia Beach, where the beach was off-limits to African Americans. He also regularly returned home without official leave. Womack left the Army in the early 1960s to work for National Biscuit Company. He was then employed by Reynolds Metals Company, a unionized aluminum plant, where he worked as a shop steward alongside his brother, a foreman. There, Womack was elected to the company's negotiating committee, which handled local issues. He also served as secretary-treasurer of the Delaware County AFL-CIO, for which he attempted, unsuccessfully, to run for president. Womack recalls difficulties in organizing African Americans to attend union meetings.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section A2005\_155\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:08 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack worked as a shop steward and machine operator at Reynolds Metals Company while serving as secretary-treasurer for the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations branch in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. He became chairman of Reynolds' negotiating committee, handling incidents at

the local level. In one instance, Womack advocated to lower the flag to half-mast after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the mid-1960s, he left Reynolds to work for the AFL-CIO Appalachian Council in Eastern Pennsylvania, and then for Job Corps. In 1971, he obtained a field director position for the AFL-CIO's Human Resources Development Institute in Washington, D.C. He describes factors, such as candidate likeability, that motivate participation in the political process. Womack talks about African Americans' union involvement. He also describes conflicts with his brother regarding unions, and meeting Frederick O'Neal and C. L. Dellums.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section A2005\_155\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:20 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack was hired by William E. Pollard as a staff member for the AFL-CIO's Civil Rights Department in 1977. In 1986, he became director of the department, where he remained until the early 1990s. As director, Womack was involved in movement against apartheid, speaking to the South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry about labor regulations. He also advocated for black firefighters' affirmative action in Cleveland, Ohio, and served as a mediator between the International Association of Fire Fighters and the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters. Womack describes the connection between the labor movement and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the trajectory of the labor movement since the 1950s, including the decline of union membership and the impact of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. He also remembers consequences of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization's 1981 strike.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section A2005\_155\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:29 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack mediated between the International Association of Fire Fighters and the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters as director of the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department. At the time of the interview, Womack believed the former made strides in terms of diversity, such as electing persons of color to its executive board. After serving in the Civil Rights

Department, he became assistant to the AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, in the early 1990s. In that position, Womack advised the president regarding civil rights and social justice policy issues, including immigration, and represented AFL-CIO on the executive committee of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Womack describes the AFL-CIO's relationship with civil rights organizations, especially the NAACP. He talks about the future of the labor movement and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He reflects upon his life and legacy, concluding by describing his family.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard G. Womack, Section A2005\_155\_001\_007, TRT: 0:15:55 2005/06/29

Richard G. Womack became chairman of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, a position previously held by Eddie Williams, in the early 1990s. Founded by Williams, William E. Pollard and Margaret Bush Wilson in 1976, the organization's mission involved educating and engaging the African American community in the political process, particularly in voting. Womack was also appointed by President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton to the board of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, where he advocated for greater work opportunities and job training for inmates. At the time of the interview, Womack served on the board of the NAACP alongside Myrlie Evers-Williams and Julian Bond. Womack concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.