

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vincent Harding

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harding, Vincent
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vincent Harding,
Dates:	April 21, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:58).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and theologian Vincent Harding (1931 - 2014) was Professor of Religion and Social Transformation at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. A close associate and speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harding was the first director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and was co-founder and chair of the Veterans of Hope Project. Harding was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 21, 2006, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_082
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Theologian, author, and civil rights activist Vincent Gordon Harding was born on July 25, 1931, in New York City. Harding's mother grew up in Barbados before coming to New York City. As a child, Harding developed a strong relationship with the church as a member of the Victory Tabernacle Seventh Day Christian Church in Harlem.

As a student, Harding was interested in journalism. In 1948, he received his diploma from Morris High School in the Bronx and entered the City College of New York, where he became the first African American editor of the college's newspaper. Harding received his B.A. degree in history from the City College of New York and continued his studies at Columbia University where he received his M.A. degree in journalism in 1953. That same year, Harding was drafted into the United States Army where he served at Fort Dicks in New Jersey. During that time, he became more drawn to the bible. Upon being discharged from the Army, Harding attended the University of Chicago where he received his PhD in the history of Christianity and became a lay pastor at a small church in Chicago.

During the 1960s, Harding was a civil rights activist with the Southern Freedom Movement. He was also a close associate and speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Harding was the first director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center in Atlanta, Georgia. He also taught at Spelman College. Serving as senior academic advisor, he has worked for film and television projects including the PBS television series *Eyes on the Prize*.

While a founder and co-chair of the Veterans of Hope Project, Harding produced videotapes that feature African Americans whose work personifies the ongoing struggle for human rights. In addition, he is the author of numerous essays and nine books, which include *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* in 1990; *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* in 1993; and *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero* in 1995.

As Professor of Religion and Social Transformation at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, Harding continues to teach and serve as lecturer and advisor to churches, synagogues, schools, prisons and community groups.

Vincent Harding passed away on May 19, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vincent Harding was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 21, 2006, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and theologian Vincent Harding (1931 - 2014) was Professor of Religion and Social Transformation at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. A close associate and speechwriter for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harding was the first director of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center in Atlanta, Georgia, and was co-founder and chair of the Veterans of Hope

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:

Harding, Vincent

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Harding, Vincent--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American college teachers--Interviews

African American theologians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Veterans of Hope Project

Iloff School of Theology

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

Theologian

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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 Vincent Harding, April 21, 2006. 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 Vincent Harding, Section A2006_082_001_001, TRT: 0:28:38 2006/04/21

Vincent Harding was born on July 25, 1931 in New York City to Mabel Broome Harding and Graham Harding. Harding's mother was born in 1898 in Barbados, where she was educated through the eighth grade, and had several sisters and brothers, one of whom became a school superintendent. Harding's mother moved to the United States with a family friend in 1921, and initially worked at a garment factory in downtown New York City. Harding

never met his paternal or maternal grandparents, but remembers his mother's grief over their deaths. When Harding was five years old, his parents separated, and he had little contact with his father from that time. As a child, he lived in rooming houses with his mother, who was deeply religious, and found a supportive community at the Victory Tabernacle Seventh Day Christian Church. Harding's mother encouraged him to excel in school. He also describes his mother's personality, and his close relationship with her cousins.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American college teachers--Interviews.

African American theologians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Vincent Harding, Section
A2006_082_001_002, TRT: 0:29:02 2006/04/21

Vincent Harding grew up in New York City's Harlem community, where saxophonist Lucky Millinder was his neighbor. His mother belonged to the large West Indian congregation led by Pastor Philip J. Bailey at the Victory Tabernacle Seventh Day Christian Church, which left the white Seventh-day Adventist church during the Marcus Garvey movement. At church, Harding read the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson, wrote publications and sang in the choir. He also attended national church conferences. At Morris High School, Harding considered playing for the basketball team, but was encouraged by his teacher to join the Morris Piper newspaper staff instead. Harding went on to study history at the City College of New York. He was the first African American editor of its newspaper, and became a part time reporter for The New York Times. He was initially interested in journalism, but later aspired to become a teacher. After graduation, Harding considered joining the U.S. Army to travel the world.

Video Oral History Interview with Vincent Harding, Section
A2006_082_001_003, TRT: 0:29:07 2006/04/21

Vincent Harding excelled at P.S. 24 in New York City. After his and his mother's apartment was burglarized, they moved to the Bronx, New York, and he transferred to Galvani Junior High School, where statesman Colin L.

Powell also attended. Harding went on to attend Morris High School, where he wrote for the Morris Piper; was mentored by his biology teacher; and found summer employment with the help of his academic advisor, Irene Berger. Later, upon graduating from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 1953, Harding was drafted to the U.S. Army. He was placed in the personnel office at Fort Dix in New Jersey, rather than abroad as he had hoped. While completing basic training, Harding read the bible, and felt conflicted about his nonviolent religious beliefs. He trained as a personnel specialist at Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana, where he was also assigned to teach a class. Realizing he wanted to be a teacher, Harding turned down a position at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Video Oral History Interview with Vincent Harding, Section A2006_082_001_004, TRT: 0:29:08 2006/04/21

Vincent Harding pursued a master's degree in history at the advice of his college professor. He rejected offers from Harvard University and Yale University, and enrolled at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. There, he preached part time at a branch of the Victory Tabernacle Seventh Day Christian Church. At the University of Chicago, Harding learned about the history of Christianity, and lived in a rooming house rather than on campus. After meeting his wife, Rosemarie Freney Harding, Harding joined the Mennonite church, and adopted their nonviolent ideals. Harding left college to join the Civil Rights Movement, and did not graduate until 1965. With members of the Mennonite church, he travelled throughout the South promoting nonviolence, and met Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, who encouraged him to continue his community outreach work. Harding recalls being threatened at a restaurant in Tennessee, and the verdict of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954.

Video Oral History Interview with Vincent Harding, Section A2006_082_001_005, TRT: 0:25:03 2006/04/21

Vincent Harding married his wife, Rosemarie Freney Harding, in 1960, and moved to Atlanta, Georgia to join the Civil Rights Movement. There, Harding met

professors Staughton Lynd and Howard Zinn, and protested against their dismissal from Spelman College. After graduating from the University of Chicago in 1965, Harding returned to Atlanta to become the chairman of the history department at Spelman College with support from Zinn, the previous chairman. Because of Harding's friendship with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King asked him to become the first director of The King Center. Harding talks about the social unrest that followed King's death, and the importance of founding The King Center in 1968. Harding recalls learning about the African American migration to the North from his wife's family. He also remembers his mother's work as a housekeeper at the Hotel Pierre in New York City; and spending the summers with his maternal uncle, Gordon McDonald Broome, in Boston, Massachusetts.