Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alice Windom

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Windom, Alice

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom,


Physical Description: 13 Betacam SP videocassettes (6:10:53).

Abstract: Social worker Alice Windom (1936 - ) was part of a historic group of African American expatriates in Ghana. She worked on the Encyclopedia Africana with W.E.B DuBois and helped to plan Malcolm X’s trip to Ghana. Windom was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 19, 2006, October 17, 2007 and December 7, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2006_181

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Social worker Alice Mary Windom was born on March 30, 1936, in St. Louis, Missouri to Frances Louise Jones Windom and Dr. John Henry Windom. Windom is from a family of educators. Her grandfather, Christopher Columbus Jones, was Southern Illinois University’s first African American student. Windom’s parents met at the University of Illinois and raised their daughter on African American college campuses at Albany State College and Prairie View A&M University. She attended Prairie View Training School in Texas and Cote Brilliante Elementary School in St. Louis. Windom graduated from Sumner High School in 1953. Offered half tuition at Central State University (CSU) in Wilberforce, Ohio, Windom was exposed to African American historian and school president Dr. Charles Wesley and lectures by Thurgood Marshall, J.A. Rogers and others. She started and organized a successful sit-in of Xenia, Ohio’s Geir’s Restaurant in 1957. Graduating that year with her B.S. degree in social work, Windom went on to earn her M.S.W. degree from the University of Chicago in 1959.

From June 1958 to August of 1962, Windom worked as a social worker and as a child welfare worker for the State of Illinois Department of Mental Health Division of Family and Children’s Services. From 1962 to 1964, Windom made a decision to live and work in Ghana, West Africa. Working as a secondary school teacher and secretary to the Ethiopian Ambassador, Windom was a part of an historic group of diverse African American expatriates in Ghana which included John Henrik Clarke, Maya Angelou, Curtis “Kojo” Morrow and the elder W.E.B. DuBois. In 1964, Windom helped plan the itinerary for Malcolm X’s trip to Ghana and served as administrative assistant for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa from 1964 to 1968, organizing international conferences in seven countries. From 1969 to 1972, Windom was a social welfare organizer for the Department of Social Welfare in Lusaka, Zambia. In the United States, she served as director of social services for the St. Louis Medium Security Institution from 1973 to 1974. In 1977, Windom sued the City of St. Louis for
racial and sexual discrimination and the denial of free speech.

Known for her many well-documented excursions to the African world, Windom served as coordinator for the James T. Bush Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis; initiating research and workshops in employment, education, housing, and law. A sought after lecturer, Windom is a member of a number of organizations including the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization and the African Heritage Studies Association.

Alice Mary Windom lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

Alice Mary Windom was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on December 19, 2006.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Alice Windom was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 19, 2006, October 17, 2007 and December 7, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 13 Betacam SP videocassettes. Social worker Alice Windom (1936 - ) was part of a historic group of African American expatriates in Ghana. She worked on the Encyclopedia Africana with W.E.B DuBois and helped to plan Malcolm X’s trip to Ghana.

**Restrictions**

**Restrictions on Access**

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

**Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Persons:**

Windom, Alice, 1936-.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer).
Hickey, Matthew

Stearns, Scott

(Videographer).

**Subjects:**

- African Americans--Interviews.
- Windom, Alice, 1936---Interviews.
- African American social workers--Interviews.

**Organizations:**

- HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

- CivicMakers

**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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/24/2011 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
Detailed Description of the Collection


Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_001_001, TRT: 0:28:41
2006/12/19

Alice Mary Windom slates the interview and lists her favorites. Windom talks about the background of her mother, Frances Louise Jones Windom, and maternal grandfather, Christopher Columbus Jones (CC Jones). CC was one of the first African American students to graduate from Southern Illinois University, but not without some struggle. He became the principal at Lincoln School, which served the African American community in Edwardsville, Illinois. The community itself did not experience strict segregation and the school district funded some of the African American students' high school education. Windom notes that the Jones family valued education for all of their ten children and comments why they thought education for their daughters were a necessity. She reflects on her mother’s experience in Edwardsville, Illinois as the principal’s daughter. Windom speaks about the 1904 St. Louis [Missouri] World’ Fair and why African Americans did not attend the fair.

African American families--Illinois--Edwardsville.
African American--Education(Higher).
African American families--Missouri--St. Louis.
African American parents--Illinois--Edwardsville.
Exhibitions--1900-1910.
Saint Louis (Mo.).

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_001_002, TRT: 0:30:22
2006/12/19

Alice Mary Windom comments that because female teachers could not be married, her parents got married in secret and when they wanted to start a family they married publicly. Windom’s mother quit her teaching job in Madison, Illinois and Windom was born nine or ten months later. She discusses the moves from Bloomington, Indiana, to Albany, Georgia, to Prairie View, Texas that the family made, while her father was searching for a full time faculty position. Windom talks about the time when she was fondled by an older boy and her mother’s reaction to the event. She enjoyed growing up in Prairie View, Texas and states that it was a close knit community. Windom talks about her elementary experience at Prairie View Training School and the social distinctions that were made there. She notes that she only saw Caucasians when the family went shopping in the neighboring towns.

African American families--Georgia--Albany.
African American families--Texas--Prairie View.
Children--Crimes against--United States.
Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College.
African Americans--Education (Elementary).
Child sexual abuse.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_001_003, TRT: 0:28:36
2006/12/19

Alice Mary Windom as a student at Prairie View Training School in Prairie View, Texas was eager to learn and always wanted to answer the questions. However, she notes that her mother told her that she should let other students have the opportunity to learn as well. In addition, from her mother she learned how to stand up for your rights and for yourself. Windom reflects on the fact that in her house and in other places on the Prairie View campus African American talked about African American problems not their history. The Windoms subscribed to the Black newspapers the “Pittsburgh Courier” and the “Chicago Defender.” Windom discusses the impact that the newspapers had on her consciousness and her ideas about Caucasians. Windom provides information about how religion has not been a major role in her life and what happened when she decided to get baptized.

African Americans--Race relations--United States.
African American children.
African American families--Texas--Prairie View.
African Americans--Education (Elementary).
African American parents.
African Americans--Religious life.
African American church.
African American newspapers.
Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Co.
Chicago defender (Chicago, Ill. : Weekly).
African American universities and colleges--Texas--Prairie View.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_001_004, TRT: 0:29:24

2006/12/19

Alice Mary Windom discusses living in Edwardsville, Illinois on her grandfather’s property, while her father was making housing arrangements for the family in St. Louis, Missouri. When the family moved to St. Louis, Windom attended Cote Brilliante School and the principal was John Mercer Langston. Overall, she enjoyed attending the school, however, she comments that there were two teachers there that gave her a hard time. She reflects upon the differences in experiences and dress between when she graduated eighth grade and how students dress today. Windom details her experiences at Charles E. Sumner High School and how the students benefited from school segregation. Afterwards, she attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, against the wishes of the teachers at Sumner. At Central she encountered African American scholars and activists. Windom briefly talks about her experience trying to integrate a local restaurant.

African American--Education (Secondary)--Missouri--St. Louis.
African American--Education (Higher).
Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio).
African American families--Illinois--Edwardsville.
Segregation in education--Missouri--St. Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30

2006/12/19

Alice Mary Windom talks about why she majored in social work; her involvement with CORE and integrating the restaurants in St. Louis, Missouri. She details what happened when she was shoved out of Geir’s Restaurant in
Xenia, Ohio and Central State’s student body reaction. Despite the students’ efforts the segregation policy at the restaurant did not change until after Windom graduated. She recalls reading an article in "Jet" magazine about students at Central State University organizing and finally desegregating the restaurant. Windom remembers professors at Central State and how much the college restricted co-ed activities. She reflects on the various jobs that she had as a bookkeeper for a hair manufacturing company in St. Louis and as a typist for Wright-Patterson Air Force base in Ohio.

Civil rights demonstrations.
African American college students.
Student movements--United States.
High school students--Employment.
College students--Employment.
Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (Ohio).
African American periodicals.
Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio).
Johnson Publishing Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_002_006, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/10/17

Alice Mary Windom talks about her educational experience at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, where she obtained her Masters of Social Work in 1959. At the University, she felt that she had to educate the Caucasian faculty and students about cultural sensitivity when working with African American clients. Windom discusses her work with intercontinental adoption in Chicago, Illinois, after the Korean War. Most couples adopted children from China or Korea. The Korean children were mostly fathered by American soldiers. In the early 1960s, Windom became involved with the Afro-American Heritage organization that was led by Ishmael Flory and attended lectures hosted by African Studies scholars and political lectures. She notes that the Communist Party had a medium-sized membership among the African American community in Chicago. Windom details how she obtained more information about the Nation of Islam and their activities in Chicago.

Minorities in social work education--United States.
Women in social work education--United States.
Social work education--United States.
Intercountry adoption--Korea.
Intercountry adoption--China.
University of Chicago.
Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.).

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_002_007, TRT: 0:31:40 2007/10/17

Alice Mary Windom talks about the community meeting at Chatham Avalon Park and the reaction of the community members to her statements about inviting Nation of Islam members to their meetings. She recalls waiting for four hours to hear Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad speak at a Chicago temple. Windom explains that when Malcolm spoke he was able to relate to the audience, but Muhammad was incoherent most of the time. During this time, Windom became involved with the Pan-Africanism movement that was
happening both within the United States and abroad. In 1962, Windom left the U.S. because of racial discrimination to go to Ghana. Her first job in Ghana was teaching English, English Literature and History to African children at O'Reilly Secondary School in Adabraka, Ghana, where she contested how African history was taught.

Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.).
Pan-Africanism.
African Americans--Travel--Ghana.
International travel.
Elijah Muhammad, 1897-1975.
English language--Study and teaching (Secondary)--Foreign speakers.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_002_008, TRT: 0:30:10 2007/10/17

Alice Mary Windom talks about her life after teaching at the O'Reilly Secondary School in Adabraka, Ghana. In particular her activist work organizing Malcolm X's 1964 visit to Ghana and volunteering to work with W.E.B. Du Bois on the book "Encyclopedia Africana." Windom comments on how she knew that Kwame Nkrumah's government was not going to last long. She recounts the time that Maya Angelou came to visit Ghana and when Angelou's son, Guy, was injured in a car accident. Windom notes that there were few African Americans living in Ghana during the early 1960s and that they could be separated into two groups: nationalists and business people. The African Americans who lived in Ghana were still concerned with the status of African Americans in America and showed solidarity when they could.

African diaspora--Encyclopedias.
Blacks--Encyclopedias.
African Americans--Relations with Africans.
Angelou, Maya.
X, Malcolm, 1925-1965--Political and social views.
Ghana.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_002_009, TRT: 0:31:10 2007/10/17

Alice Mary Windom discusses her time in Ethiopia working for the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa at the Ethiopian embassy and the social conditions that she experienced there. Windom recounts meeting Malcolm X at the Ras Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in October 1964. When they met, he talked to her about wanting to meet with leader Haile Selassie, but Windom heard that he did not want to meet with Malcolm. She returned to Ethiopia in 1995 and she talks about the differences that she saw in the country as compared to the country in 1960s. In 1973, Windom moved back to St. Louis, Missouri, where she worked as the Director of Social Services at the medium correctional services division. She details the racism and sex discrimination that she experienced in the position.

African Americans--Relations with Africans.
Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_003_010, TRT: 0:29:20 2007/12/07

Alice Mary Windom discusses her involvement in community organizations such as the Campaign for Human Dignity, which was created to push for the reopening of Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri. She also worked at the Institute for Black Studies, which was co-founded by Robert L. Williams, where she ran an internship program. In 1975, Windom took two trips to Africa to help her friend, Dr. Emily S. Maliwa, start a Pan-African Research Council, which would be continent wide and be responsible for research on the history and culture of medical needs relevant to Africa. Windom comments that the trips were to garner support amongst African professors and governments; however, the creation of the council was unsuccessful due to lack of government support. Windom reflects on working as a social worker with clients at the Yeatman/Union-Sarah Community Mental Health Center in St. Louis, Missouri.

Homer G. Phillips Hospital.
African American social workers.
Pan-Africanism.
African Americans--Travel--Africa.
Social workers--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Windom, Section A2006_181_003_011, TRT: 0:30:10 2007/12/07

Alice Mary Windom discusses working at the Yeatman/Union-Sarah Community Mental Health Center in St. Louis, Missouri, and details the circumstances that led her to quit the organization. Afterwards, she worked at the Booker T. Washington Foundation and the Department of Defense on their efforts to increase minority and women-owned businesses contracts. Windom talks about her travels to Mexico in 1984, where she learned about African rulers in Mexico and to Egypt to attend the 1987 Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) conference. She, along with others who attended the conference, started a St. Louis chapter of ASCAC. Windom laments the loss of scholars, who have made a contribution to the study of ancient African history. Windom talks about how she became the manager of the James T. Bush Center (Public Policy Research Center) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1986.

Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations. Conference.
Mexico--Civilization--African influences.
African American social workers.
University of Missouri--St. Louis. Public Policy Research Centers.
United States.--Dept. of Defense.
African Americans--Travel--Egypt.
African Americans--Travel--Mexico.
Alice Mary Windom discusses the lectures at the James T. Bush Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The topics and people who participated in the lectures varied; the recorded lectures were used to raise money for the program. Windom discusses the impact of Sylvia Ardyn Boone, who was one of the Bush Center's lecturers, on helping people understand West African culture better with her work "West African Travels: A Guide to People and Places." In addition, she provides her perspective on the role of women in African Islamic and non-Islamic countries. As a result of her previous trip to Mexico, Windom was fascinated by the Olmec heads and returned in 1989 and 1990 to photograph them. She also discusses their significance. Windom shares the circumstances that led her to retire from the Bush Center in 1998 and the aftermath of her house fire in 2001.

University of Missouri--St. Louis. Public Policy Research Centers.
Boone, Sylvia Ardyn.
Mexico--Civilization--African influences.
Women--Islamic countries--Social condition.
Women--Africa, West--Social conditions.
Dwellings--Fires and fire prevention.
Olmec sculpture.
Olmec art.
Africa, West--Guidebooks.

Alice Mary Windom discusses her hopes and concerns for the African American community, which includes wanting the community to recognize the importance and connection to Africa. She acknowledges that this may be hard due to the media's attention on the negative aspects of life in Africa, but hopes that African Americans will not be distracted by the images. Rather they should look in the long-term and realize that the image of Africa also impacts how Africans throughout the Diaspora are seen. Windom wants individual African Americans to have a respect for learning and to gain skills that will be valuable for the community. Throughout her life, Windom has talked to young people about the importance of Africa. Windom discusses the lives of her two brothers, Jackson and John Windom, their children and wives.

African American families--Missouri--St. Louis.
Africa--Foreign public opinion.
African Americans--Relations with Africans.