

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Randall, Alice
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall,
Dates:	March 17, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:06:54).
Abstract:	Writer Alice Randall (1959 -) authored the New York Times bestseller <i>The Wind Done Gone</i> , and was the first African American woman to write a number one hit country song, "XXX's and OOO's: An American Girl." Randall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 17, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Writer Alice Randall was born to Mari-Alice and George Randall on May 4, 1959 in Detroit, Michigan. She spent her early years in Detroit where she attended St. Phillips Lutheran School and Greenfield Peace Lutheran School. Moving with her mother to Washington, D.C., she was enrolled at Amidon Elementary School and graduated from Georgetown Day School. Briefly traveling to Great Britain to enroll in the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London, she returned to enter Harvard University in the fall of 1977.

At Harvard, she was influenced by Hubert Matos, Harry Levin and Nathan Irving Huggins and was a member of the International Relations Council. Randall earned honors and her B.A. degree in English and American literature in 1981. In the early 1980s, Randall worked as a journalist and as a writer for Wolftrap Performing Arts Center in Washington, D.C. Cultivating a taste for country music in 1981, Randall decided to move to Nashville in 1983 to become a country music song-writer. Having her first country hits in 1983 and 1984, Randall wrote "Girls Ride Horses Too" in 1987 and garnered a number one hit with "XXX's and OOO's: An American Girl" recorded by Trisha Yearwood in 1993. Writing over 200 country songs with thirty recorded, Randall is the first African American woman to have a number one country hit.

Randall's first novel, "The Wind Done Gone" is a reinterpretation and parody of "Gone with the Wind." The title critiques "Gone with the Wind" from the viewpoint of Scarlett O'Hara's half-sister Cynara, a mulatto slave on Scarlett's plantation. The estate of Margaret Mitchell sued Randall and her publishing company, Houghton Mifflin, on the grounds that "The Wind Done Gone" was too similar to "Gone with the Wind," thus infringing its copyright. The lawsuit was eventually settled, allowing "The Wind Done Gone" to be published. The novel became a New York Times bestseller. Randall's second novel, "Pushkin and the Queen of Spades," was named as one of the Washington Post's "Best Fiction of 2004."

As a screenwriter, Randall wrote a television movie for CBS based on her song XXX's and OOO's: An American Girl in 1994, and contributed to screenplay adaptations of "Their Eyes Were Watching God," "Brer Rabbit" and "Parting the Waters." In the 1990s, she and fellow songwriter, J. C. Crowley, created a film and television development company called Black and White Pictures. Randall and friend, Mimi Oka, now operate a film and television development company in Nashville called "She Writes Movies, Inc." She is also a member of the Harvard-Radcliffe Club of Middle Tennessee. Randall has recently published the book "Rebel Yell" in September, 2009. Randall is married to attorney, David Steele Ewing and has a daughter, Caroline Randall Williams.

Alice Randall was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 17, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alice Randall was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 17, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP

videocassettes. Writer Alice Randall (1959 -) authored the New York Times bestseller *The Wind Done Gone*, and was the first African American woman to write a number one hit country song, "XXX's and OOO's: An American Girl."

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:

Randall, Alice

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Randall, Alice--Interviews

African American entertainers--Interviews

African American authors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Writer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Alice Randall, March 17, 2007. 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 Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_001, TRT: 0:29:43 2007/03/17

Alice Randall was born on May 4, 1959 in Detroit, Michigan to Bettie Randall Reilly and George Randall. Randall's paternal grandfather was a descendent of Confederate General Edmund Pettus. Her father was born near Selma, Alabama to Georgia Litsey Randall and William Randall, who were of mixed heritage. At thirteen years old, Randall's father moved with his family to Detroit, where he played on Coach Will Robinson's basketball team at Sidney D. Miller High School. Randall's mother was born in Ironton, Ohio, and was orphaned at a young age. She was raised by a foster family in Farmington, Michigan, and began her education at a Lutheran school. When Randall's mother was a teenager, a social worker removed her from the home, and placed her in Detroit. There, Randall's mother graduated from high school, and became one of the first African American

telephone operators at the Michigan Bell Telephone Company. Randall also describes her relationship with her mother, which was often strained.

African American families--Michigan.

African American families--Alabama--Selma.

Passing (Identity).

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Miscegenation--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_002, TRT: 0:29:41 2007/03/17

Alice Randall's parents, Bettie Randall Reilly and George Randall, met and married in Detroit, Michigan. There, her father opened a dry cleaning business, and Randall attended The Roeper School and then St. Philip's Day School. Randall's mother often brought her to downtown Detroit, where they ate Crepe Suzette at the London Chop House and visited the Detroit Institute of Arts. Randall also enjoyed spending time with her paternal grandparents, homemaker Georgia Litsey Randall and farmer and business owner William Randall. Randall's father was acquainted with Motown Records founder Berry Gordy, who invited her family to a performance by The Supremes at New York City's Copacabana. Through Gordy's influence, Randall became interested in songwriting at an early age. Randall's parents separated when she was in the third grade; and, in 1967, she relocated with her mother to Washington, D.C. She also remembers her father's childhood friend, who was a notable gangster in Detroit.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

African American children--Michigan--Detroit.

Riots--Michigan--Detroit.

African American fathers--Michigan--Detroit.

African American parents--Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_003, TRT: 0:29:07 2007/03/17

Alice Randall grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and witnessed the riots that ensued after the Algiers Motel

incident. She briefly attended Detroit's Greenfield Peace Lutheran School, before moving with her mother, Bettie Randall Reilly, to Washington, D.C. There, her mother studied at Howard University, and enrolled Randall at the Georgetown Day School. Around 1968, Randall and her mother travelled to Nashville, Tennessee, where they attended a speech by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Shortly afterwards, Dr. King was assassinated, and Randall witnessed the riots in Washington, D.C. At the Georgetown Day School, Randall studied anthropology and literature, including the works of Louisa May Alcott, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. She also became interested in Judaism, and attended the Freedom Seder in 1969. Outside of school, Randall enjoyed independent films, and television shows like 'The Mod Squad.' She also frequented the National Gallery of Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

African Americans--Education--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Michigan--Detroit.

Riots--Michigan--Detroit.

Riots--Washington (D.C.).

Harvard University.

African American parents--Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28 2007/03/17

Alice Randall saw the film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind' for the first time during the seventh grade, and was outraged by the stereotypical depictions of the African American characters. At the time, she was unaware of racism in the South, and was more familiar with African American leaders in the Washington D.C. community, like Secretary of the U.S. Army Clifford L. Alexander, Jr. and Congressman Harold Ford, Sr. During her senior year at the Georgetown Day School, Randall studied at the University of London's Institute of Archaeology in London, England. She wrote a college application essay about the challenges she encountered while planting a strawberry field, and was accepted to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There, she studied under literary scholar

Harry Levin, and met Megumi Oka, who became her close friend. Randall also remembers her experiences of housing and financial discrimination during the 1980s in Nashville, Tennessee.

Gone with the wind (Motion picture).

Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Literature and the war.

Harvard University--Undergraduates.

Randall, Alice.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin, 1927-.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_005, TRT: 0:29:32 2007/03/17

Alice Randall attended Harvard University, where she studied under historian Nathan Huggins, and read the works of Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer and Claude McKay. She also brought Cuban activist Huber Matos to speak at the Radcliffe Forum on campus. Upon graduating in 1981, Randall worked for a literary agent, and completed a writing residency at the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia. After developing an interest in country music, she began her career as a songwriter. Randall's first hit, 'Reckless Night,' was recorded by the Forester Sisters in 1984. She also wrote the songs 'Girls Ride Horses Too' and 'XXX's and OOO's (An American Girl),' and became the first black woman to write a top charted country song. Randall wrote over thirty country songs on subjects like single motherhood, the Civil War and the Iraq War. She also talks about the music of country artists like Merle Haggard, the Dixie Chicks and Chuck Berry, including the songs 'Memphis' and 'Johnny B. Goode.'

Harvard University.

Country music--Tennessee--Nashville.

Nashville (Tenn.).

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection).

Matos, Huber, 1918-.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section

Alice Randall worked as a screenwriter during the 1980s and 1990s, and sold her first screenplay, 'Shadowboxing,' to the Paramount Pictures Corporation. She went on to work with television executive Brandon Tartikoff, and wrote the CBS television movie, 'X's and O's.' Randall also wrote 'Mother Dixie,' which was purchased by producer Quincy Jones and media mogul Oprah Winfrey; and 'Black Diamond Express,' which was inspired by the life of 19th century African American cowboy Britt Johnson. Randall was an uncredited writer for such films as 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' and 'Boomerang,' which was directed by Reginald Hudlin. Inspired by Henry Fielding's parodic literature and Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.'s literary theory, Randall began writing a parody of 'Gone with the Wind' in 1999. 'The Wind Done Gone' was released in 2001, and Randall went on to publish 'Pushkin and the Queen of Spades' in 2004. Randall also talks about the racial gap in educational achievement.

African American screenwriters.

African American novelists.

African Americans--Employment.

Gone with the wind (Motion picture).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

African American students.

Warner Bros.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section

A2007_094_001_007, TRT: 0:29:55 2007/03/17

Alice Randall wrote 'The Wind Done Gone' as a critical response to 'Gone with the Wind' by Margaret Mitchell. After the release of Randall's novel, which centered on the African American characters Mammy and Prissy, Randall and her publisher were sued by Margaret Mitchell's estate, which claimed that the book infringed upon its copyrights. Judge Charles A. Pannell, Jr. ruled in favor of Mitchell's estate, but Randall won after bringing the case to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. After threatening to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court,

Mitchell's estate agreed to a settlement, which mandated that Randall speak at the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, Randall received death threats from fans of the original novel, and required a protective detail while conducting her book tour. Despite the initial challenges, Randall's novel was well-received by the academic and popular readership, and was listed for six weeks as one of The New York Times' bestsellers.

Gone with the wind (Motion picture).

African American women in motion pictures.

McDaniel, Hattie, 1895-1952--Performances.

Race relations in literature.

Mitchell, Margaret, 1900-1949.

Museums--Georgia--Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_008, TRT: 0:29:39 2007/03/17

Alice Randall was first married to Avon Williams, III, who was the son of Senator Avon Williams, Jr. and the grandson of Harlem Renaissance poet Arna Bontemps. In 1997, she remarried attorney David Ewing. At the time of the interview, Randall was in the process of writing her novel, 'Rebel Yell.' Randall describes her close friendships with her former mother-in-law, Joan Bontemps Williams, and McKissack & McKissack CEO, Leatrice McKissack, as well as her hopes and concerns for the African American community such as the achievement gap and family structure. She reflects upon her career, legacy and family, including her daughter, Caroline Randall Williams.

African American families--United States.

African American students--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section
A2007_094_001_009, TRT: 0:11:36 2007/03/17

Alice Randall describes how she would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Randall, Alice