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: Alice Randall
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall,
Dates: March 17, 2007
Bulk Dates: 2007
Physical Description: 9 Betacam SP videocassettes (4:06:54).
Abstract: Fiction writer, lyricist, and screenwriter Alice Randall (1959 - ) wrote New York Times bestseller "The Wind Done Gone." Randall is the first African American woman to have a number one country hit ("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®

Fiction writer, lyricist, and screenwriter 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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Fiction writer, lyricist, and screenwriter Alice Randall (1959 - ) wrote New York Times bestseller "The Wind Done Gone." Randall is the first African American woman to have a number one country hit ("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

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

MusicMakers

EntertainmentMakers

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 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, March 17, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section A2007_094_001_001, TRT: 0:29:43

2007/03/17

Alice Randall discusses her family background. She describes her mother as a “not easy woman” due to hardships caused by her being part of the foster care system. Randall’s mother lost both her parents during her childhood, but was immediately adopted by the Jackson family, who was passing and from whom she was later taken from. Randall also discusses her maternal grandparents who she believes were of Native American descent and she talks about her paternal family. Her paternal grandparents were both biracial. Her grandfather, William Randall, is believed to be a direct descendant of the Confederate General Edmund Pettus, possibly his son. She reveals her father’s departure from Alabama at age thirteen and his return after her college graduation. Randall believes her father was a racist man, which stems from his own white relations. She describes him as a gifted storyteller and talks about the influence he had on her education and the development of her political consciousness.

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 discusses how her parents met. Her mother initially disregarded her father’s attempts, but, eventually he succeeded in courting her. Randall describes her mother as externally beautiful. She tells the story of her father not wanting to have a child, he already had two children. However, when he saw Randall, he immediately fell in love and she talks about her father’s influence in her life. She makes comparisons between her parents. She emphasized the caring nature of her father and the lack of emotion of her mother. Randall describes the excitement of Detroit when she was growing up. Randall describes herself as street tough with a different approach. She shares childhood memories.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit
African American childhood--Michigan--Detroit
Riots--Michigan--Detroit
Randall, Alice
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 continues to talk about her school experiences from elementary school to her attendance at Harvard University. Randall talks about the effects of her parents’ divorce and her moving with her mother to Washington, D.C. She remembers feeling like she had been kidnapped from her father’s family. Randall describes her mother as an extremely thoughtful, smart, and ambitious. Randall recalls living through the Detroit riots of 1967 and the Washington riots of 1968. She explains that blacks became tired of everyday inequities in Detroit. In comparison, the Detroit riots were more intense for Randall. Randall discusses Georgetown Day School in Washington, D.C. and her educational experiences as wonderful. Randall recalls learning to read at a very young age because her father read the newspaper out loud to her. Randall begins to discuss her interest in film.

African American education--Washington (D.C.)
African American childhood—Michigan—Detroit
Riots--Michigan--Detroit
Riots--Washington (D.C.)
Randall, Alice
Harvard University
African American parents--Divorce

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section A2007_094_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28

Alice Randall discusses the movie “Gone with the Wind.” Randall felt outraged by the end of the book and could not understand why others were not. Randall did not initially understand the alternative history told. Randall talks about racial encounters she experienced in Nashville, Tennessee involving neighbors and banking institutions. Randall recalls a speech she gave about costume authenticity for the movie for an upcoming exhibit. The costumes were the least inauthentic of the film and she became inspired to write, “The Wind Done Gone.” Randall shares stories of the difficulties with her mother resulting in her move to England. Despite the poor living conditions, Randall describes England as her first taste of freedom and explains her high school years were about getting to a better place. Randall describes Harvard University as a safe haven.

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

Alice Randall talks about her mentor, Nathan Huggins, who had a great influence on her becoming a novelist. Randall discusses organizing a lecture involving Cuban revolutionary General Huber Matos and her problems became eclipsed by his presence. Randall shares her belief in The HistoryMakers project because it demonstrates the importance of African Americans knowing that they can persevere. Randall talks about life after graduating from Harvard University prior to becoming a lyricist. Randall discusses falling in love with country music. Randall explains the similarities between country and Motown music. Randall believes you cannot write and love country music without...
knowing many elements of African American culture. Randall explains both genres are soul music. Randall discusses her first country hit. Randall is the only black woman in history to write a number one country song. She feels she has done a lot for country music, particularly as a feminist.

Alice Randall talks about her career. She noted that she was a songwriter in her twenties, a screenwriter in her thirties and a novelist in her forties. Randall has sold five stories to production companies, including Warner Brothers. She discusses her enjoyment for screen writing, whether the project has been produced or not because it still gave her the chance to pass down the history behind the story. Randall expresses concerns about what stories Hollywood decides to produce and the way those stories are told. Randall began to writing novels after recognizing the biases in production. Randall’s first novel, “The Wind Done Gone,” is a coded parody that depicts a classic story from the point of view of the African American maid. She discusses her works as a novelist and talks about the unintended consequences of the court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education.

Alice Randall discusses Margaret Mitchell’s novel, “Gone with the Wind” and explains that she wanted to tell the untold story. Randall continues with criticisms of the novel noting that African Americans are continuously depicted as stupid. She feels Mitchell’s novel is about trying to find an apology for Jim Crow segregation in 1937 and to argue that the role of a black woman is only that of a domestic servant. Randall explains she decided to address Mitchell’s novel, with her novel “The Wind Done Gone” and report the historical experiences that African Americans had in response to Mitchell’s novel. Randall recalls the lawsuit over her novel and discusses the backlash she received. Randall talks about her experience speaking at the Margaret Mitchell House & Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. Randall believes her novel helped to redeem the role of the black mother and attributes the novel’s success to her talks all over the country with large black audiences.
Video Oral History Interview with Alice Randall, Section A2007_094_001_008, TRT: 0:29:39
2007/03/17

Alice Randall discusses working on her second novel, “Rebel Yell” and a movie for of the first black princess. Randall shares her concerns for the African American community, which are education, community, and home life. She explains African Americans have to help themselves and maintain a certain type of discipline. Randall believes racism today is the same as when her father went to school. Randall argues there is not a lack of discipline in the African American community and explains energies need to be redirected to broadened the horizons using education and family organization. Randall talks about her family, including her daughter Caroline Randall and husband David Ewing.

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

Alice Randall discusses her legacy and what she desires to be remembered for, including being a mom, a compassionate person, and a novelist. Randall discusses her mother’s complex nature. Randall shares and narrates personal photographs.

Randall, Alice