

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Josh White, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	White, Josh, Jr.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr.,
Dates:	June 26, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:16:42).
Abstract:	Actor and folk singer Josh White, Jr. (1940 -) entered show business at a very early age, and received his first Tony award at the age of nine. By the age of twenty-one, he had starred in more than fifty American television dramas, and co-starred with his father in Great Britain for North Grenada Television in The Josh White Show. At the peak of the folk boom, the mid-1960s through the late-1970s, White was considered one of the National Association of Campus Activities' most celebrated and honored performing artists. White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 26, 2007, in Novi, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_189
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor and folk singer Josh Daniel White, Jr. was born on November 30, 1940, in New York City to Carol and Joshua Daniel White, Sr., the legendary singer, guitarist, actor and social leader. At the age of four, White found fame by

performing with his father at New York's Café Society, America's first integrated nightclub.

White attended New York's Professional Children's School, along with Elliott Gould, Sandra Dee, Brandon De Wilde, Leslie Uggams, Christopher Walken and Marvin Hamlisch, who co-wrote White's first solo recording for Decca Records in 1956, "See Saw." In 1949, White landed his first role on Broadway by playing his father's son in, "How Long Til Summer?" White received a special Tony Award for Best Child Actor For his performance. While continuing his acting career, White went on to perform and record with his father for the next seventeen years.

In 1957, White landed a role in the Off-Broadway play, "Take a Giant Step," replacing his friend Louis Gossett, Jr. He went on to star in more than fifty American television dramas and co-starred with his father in Great Britain in, "The Josh White Show." In 1961, White decided to pursue a solo concert and recording career. From 1963 through the 1980s, White headlined more than 2,000 college concerts. At the peak of the folk boom, White was considered one of the National Association of Campus Activities' most celebrated and honored performing artists. Co-starring with Odetta Gordon, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Richie Havens, Tom Paxton and Oscar Brand, White performed on the National PBS-TV Tribute Special to Woody Guthrie, "Woody & Me," and was named the Voice of the Peace Corps and the Voice of VISTA by the United States government in 1980.

In 1991, White teamed up with Rändi Douglas, the founder of Living History, to teach history and social studies with kinesthetic, multiple intelligence activities. White gives music lecture sessions on his father for grades five through twelve.

Josh Daniel White was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 26, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Josh White, Jr. was conducted by Denise Gines on June 26, 2007, in Novi, Michigan, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actor and folk singer Josh White, Jr. (1940 -) entered show business at a very early age, and received his first Tony award at the age of nine. By the age of twenty-one, he had starred in more than fifty American television dramas, and co-starred with his father in Great Britain for North Grenada Television in *The Josh White Show*. At the peak of the folk boom, the mid-1960s through the late-1970s, White was considered one of the National Association of Campus Activities' most celebrated and honored performing artists.

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:

White, Josh, Jr.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
White, Josh, Jr.--Interviews

Artists

Folk singers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

Folk Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|MusicMakers

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 Josh White, Jr.,

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 Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. was born on November 30, 1940 in New York City to Carol Carr White and Josh White. His maternal grandmother, Rachel Carr, helped found New York City's Epworth United Methodist Church. White's paternal grandfather, Dennis White, was a minister and handyman in Greenville, South Carolina. There, White's father met a blind musician, John Henry Arnold, and became his assistant at seven years old. During their travels, White's father witnessed a lynching, and was arrested for wearing a hat in a store. When the sheriff came to the Whites' home after the arrest, White's paternal grandfather argued with him, and was sent to an asylum as a result. His father came to Chicago, Illinois with Blind Joe Taggart to record for the American Record Corporation at fourteen years old. He continued to assist blind musicians, until being scouted by a New York City record company at sixteen years old. Then, White's father

began recording gospel music as Josh White, the Singing Christian; and blues as Pinewood Tom.

African American musicians.

Lynching--Southern States.

African American families--Southern States.

African American fathers--New York (State)--New York.

African American children--New York (State)--New York.

Blind musicians.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr.'s father, Josh White, moved to New York City to become a blues singer. His parents married at eighteen years old, and moved into the home of White's maternal grandmother, Rachel Carr. At the height of his musical career, White's father injured his hand, and was unable play the guitar. He regained his dexterity after five years, and his career was soon revitalized when he was cast in the musical 'John Henry,' which starred Paul Robeson. White's father's hit songs included 'Strange Fruit,' 'House of the Rising Sun' and 'Southern Exposure.' An activist and radical, White's father befriended the Roosevelts, and was blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. After that time, White's father was ostracized in the United States, and toured in Europe. When White was young, he began performing with his father at the Café Society, an integrated venue in New York City. He recorded his first song, 'One Meat Ball,' at four years old.

United States. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities.

African American entertainers.

African Americans--Marriage.

African American singers.

African American children--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_003, TRT: 0:30:52 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. grew up in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, where he played stickball and loadies with

his friends, and experienced a diverse range of cuisines. White had many pets as a child, including a capuchin monkey given to him by a street performer, and German shepherd that was a gift from Eleanor Roosevelt. White's father, musician Josh White, became friends with the Roosevelts after writing the song 'Uncle Sam Says,' and the two families remained close. In New York City, White's musical talent was nurtured at the Downtown Community School and the Professional Children's School, where students were encouraged to pursue acting and singing careers. In 1949, White was cast in the Broadway play 'How Long Til Summer?' as the son of his father's character, and received a special Tony Award for Best Child Actor for his performance. Following this role, White was cast in several television shows, including 'Lamp Unto My Feet,' and Broadway productions of 'The Man' and 'Touchstone.'

African American students--Education (Elementary)--New York (State)--New York.

Child actors--New York (State)--New York--Drama.

African American children--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_004, TRT: 0:28:40 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. attended the Professional Children's School in New York City. During his time there, White often skipped class to ride his horse at the nearby stable. In his senior year, he took a leave of absence to perform with actor Clarence Williams III in Richard Wright and Lloyd Richards' 'The Long Dream,' and never officially graduated. White then toured Europe with his father, Josh White, in a series for Granada Television called 'The Josh White Show.' After the European tour, White and his father returned to New York City to record the album 'Josh White at Town Hall' with White's sister, vocalist Beverly White. Around this time, White's managers decided to make him a solo musician, and booked his first individual performance in Detroit, Michigan. White's musical repertoire mirrored his father's style and selection, while their performance styles differed. White did not write his own lyrics, and preferred to act as the

interpreter of others' words.

Music trade.

African American musicians.

African American fathers and sons.

Folk music.

White, Josh.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_005, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. began his first solo tour in Detroit, Michigan in the early 1960s to majority white audiences. He initially worried about African American audience members' response to his music, but learned to sing his best songs rather than cater to his listeners. White experienced discrimination in the South while travelling with his family to Tennessee to record his first single, 'Do You Close Your Eyes.' During the trip, his younger sister became ill, and they were denied assistance from local businesses. After that single, White recorded 'Do You Close Your Eyes' on Mercury Records with producer Bobby Scott; and married his high school sweetheart, Jackie Harris White, with whom he had two sons. White continued to records singles as a solo artist, and with his sisters. Over the years, White's relationship with his father, Josh White, became strained, but they reconciled the day before his father's death in 1969. After his funeral, White went on tour, and performed frequently on college campuses.

African American musicians.

Folk music.

African Americans--Marriage.

White, Josh.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_006, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. and his first wife separated in 1966, and she was shot and killed in 1971. White then moved to Wappingers Fall, New York to raise his two sons as a single father. In 1978, White married Sara White, who had four children of her own, and the family moved to Detroit, Michigan. As an interracial couple, they experienced

discrimination from the community and schools; and, after twenty years, left Detroit for Gregory, Michigan. Upon their arrival, White did not let his neighbors know that he and his wife were married until assessing what to expect from their reaction. During this time, White continued to tour and perform on late night television shows. He also portrayed his father, Josh White, in the one-man show, 'Josh: The Man and His Music.' Then, in the 1990s, White turned his attention to youth education, and created several programs on African American history, including subjects like the Underground Railroad and his father's musical career.

Segregation--New York (State)--New York.

Interracial marriage.

African American families.

United States--Race relations.

Music.

African Americans--Marriage.

White, Josh.

Video Oral History Interview with Josh White, Jr., Section
A2007_189_001_007, TRT: 0:19:50 2007/06/26

Josh White, Jr. and Randi Douglas developed the StoryLiving educational program for the Detroit Historical Museum in Detroit, Michigan. The program was influenced by the pedagogical techniques of Dorothy Heathcote, who felt that children learned best kinesthetically. StoryLiving used roleplaying and music to educate students about the history of Detroit and African Americans in the United States. The program's topics included the Underground Railroad, slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. White reflects upon the attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as his life and legacy. He concludes the interview by sharing a message to future generations.

Demonstrations.

History--Study and teaching (Elementary).

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001.