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

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
1900 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60616
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Creator: Josh White

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Josh White,

Dates: June 26, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:16:40).

Abstract: Actor and folk singer Josh White (1940 - ) is the son of acclaimed entertainer, Josh White. He 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 stared 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 was conducted by Denise Gines on June 26, 2007, in Novi, Michigan, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Actor and folk singer Josh White (1940 - ) is the son of acclaimed entertainer, Josh White. He 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 stared 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

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/14/2011 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.
Josh White Jr., discusses his childhood in New York City, New York and his family lineage. He remembers his visits to see his grandparents in the South, and the stories of his father’s, Josh White Sr., experiences helping blind musicians as a child. White Jr. states that these experiences greatly shaped his father's musical style, and he also talks about the time his father heard a man being lynched on one his excursions with a blind musician.

African American musicians. Blind Musicians
Lynchings
African American families--Southern States.
African American fathers--New York (State)--New York

Josh White, Jr. discusses his parents’ marriage and remembers how emotional his father’s rendition of, “Strange Fruit,” was. He also discusses his father’s associates Pete Seeger, Burl Ives, Brownie McGhee, Sunny Terry and Paul Robeson. White reflects on the Society Club, which was founded by Barney Josephson, and his father singing with Lena Horne and Billie Holiday. Although White and his mother were not directly impacted by his father’s House of Un-American Activities Committee trial, White talks about the repercussions his father endured from the entertainment world.

African American entertainers.
African Americans--Marriage.
African American singers.

Josh White, Jr., remembers growing up in Sugar Hill, an integrated community in Upper Harlem, New York. He recalls how safe his community was and how many pets his family had. White also reminisces about his educational experiences at Professional Children’s School, in New York City, and his career as a child actor.

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

Josh White, Jr. discusses his musical career. He remembers that his family decided that he should go out on his own at twenty years old, but he was not
disciplined enough. He recalls playing a lot of his father's music, and making sure that venue owners understood that he was Josh White, Jr., and not Josh White, Sr. He discusses the differences in his career and his father’s, and the fact that production expectations had changed in the industry. Around twenty-one, White Jr. started writing his own music and finding his own performing style. He notes that he prefers non-mainstream acoustic music because it allows people to talk about controversial issues. White briefly discusses his high school experiences and how small the classes were.

Music trade.
African American musicians.
African American fathers and sons.
Folk music.
White, Josh.

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

Josh White, Jr. talks about the fact that he always felt ostracized within the black community because he had been singing to white audiences since he was four years old. He remembers working with Bob Gibson, who helped renovate his musical style so it would be accepted by a black audience. He remembers when he was asked to perform for the NAACP in the early 1980s and how well they responded to his music. White notes that he was very aware of the fact that he represented the Black community and talks about his performances on college campuses and his desire to show that he could sing more than folk music. He also discusses his first marriage to Jackie.

African American musicians.
Folk music.
African American marriage.
White, Josh.

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

Josh White, Jr., talks about his marriage to his first wife, Jackie, and the time they protested a segregated apartment building. White also talks about his second marriage to Sarah, who was Caucasian. He felt that their relationship was a way to teach their children about race relations, although he had to hide his relationship in public to protect his family. White remembers his late night television appearances, although he never made an appearance on the Tonight Show. In the 1990s White started writing children’s music about historic and popular people. After his father died, White produced a one man show to chronicle his father's life.

Segregation--New York (State)--New York.
Interracial marriage.
African American families.
Race Relations--United States.
Music.
African American Marriage.
White, Josh.

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

Josh White, Jr. talks about his partnership with Ronnie Douglas, and the time
they protested U.S. support of a fascist government in Chile. Ronnie Douglas developed a teaching program called, “Living History” that uses music and acting to teach children about different historical events and time periods. White also talks about how he was affected by September 9, 2011, and contemplates how different his life would be if he had chosen his own career or if he would have had passion for performing.

Demonstrations.
History--Study and teaching (Elementary).