

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bill Overton

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Overton, Bill, 1947-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | April 4, 2008   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2008  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:32).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Television actor and football player Bill Overton (1947 - ) played in the NFL and Canadian Football League before turning to modeling and acting. His television credits include roles on 'The Redd Foxx Show,' '227' and 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.' Overton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 4, 2008, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2008_073   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actor Bill Overton was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and was raised by his mother and stepfather, Hessie and Eugene Waterhouse. As a child, Overton attended Boston's Asa Gray Elementary, W.L.P. Boardman Elementary, Henry L. Higginson Elementary and Lewis Junior High Schools. As an adolescent, Overton was a premiere athlete and member of his school's football and basketball teams. He attended the historical Boston English High School where he was voted vice president of his senior class.

Overton went on to attend one of Nebraska's junior colleges and established himself as one his era's phenomenal football players. His display of athletic talent at the junior college level earned him a full scholarship to attend Wake Forest University. Overton graduated in 1968 as a speech and drama major, and that same year, he was drafted by the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. In 1969, he was traded to the Kansas City Chiefs and the following year, he began playing for the Canadian Football League. Then, in 1970, Overton moved back to Boston and worked as a sports agent for Pro Sports, Inc. While there, he was instrumental in the company's signing of four-time Pro Bowler Raymond Chester, and worked to ensure fair contracts for African American football players.

In 1971, Overton began a career in modeling and was hired for various advertising agencies including Black Beauty and Ford modeling agencies. He helped to launch ad campaigns for Hanes, Benson and Hedges, Canadian Mist, Sears, and Montgomery Ward. During the 1970s, Overton also began appearing in television commercials. He honed his acting skills by enrolling at the Lee Strasberg Institute in New York City and was mentored by actor Woody Strode. Overton starred in several films throughout the mid-1970s, often appearing in roles that required him to demonstrate his athleticism. He was featured in episodes of the *New Perry Mason* series, *Firehouse* and the films *Cover Girl* and *Invisible Strangler*. Then, in 1981, he starred alongside Harry Belafonte and LeVar Burton in the film *Grambling's White Tigers*.

Overton married award winning actress Jayne Kennedy in 1985. He continued to make television appearances

throughout the 1980s and 1990s, starring in classic sitcoms such as *The Red Foxx Show*, *227*, and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*.

In 2002, Overton published *The Media: Shaping an Image of a People*. He lives in Los Angeles, California with his wife and three daughters.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bill Overton was conducted by Jacques Lesure on April 4, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television actor and football player Bill Overton (1947 - ) played in the NFL and Canadian Football League before turning to modeling and acting. His television credits include roles on 'The Redd Foxx Show,' '227' and 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air.'

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Overton, Bill, 1947-

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Overton, Bill, 1947- --Interviews

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African American television personalities--United States--Interviews

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African American athletes--Interviews

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African American models--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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National Football League.

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## **Occupations:**

Football Player

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

SportsMakers

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## **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 Bill Overton, April 4, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:03 ?

Bill Overton was born in Boston, Massachusetts to HESSIE WATERHOUSE and WILLIAM OVERTON. Overton's mother was born in High Point, North Carolina, and grew up in Leominster, Massachusetts. His primary father figure was his stepfather, Eugene Waterhouse, who was born in Boston, and served in the military police before obtaining a position as a foreman for a trucking company. Overton grew up in Boston, where he began his education at the Asa Gray School. He transferred to the W.L.P. Boardman School when his family moved to Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Overton developed an interest in sports at an early age. He initially played baseball, and was influenced by his coaches, including Chauncey Pope and Jim Mahon. While attending Earl Lewis Junior High School, Overton joined a community basketball team, and often swam at the Huntington Avenue YMCA. After the ninth grade, he enrolled at the English High School, an all-boys institution in Boston, and the oldest public school in the United States.

African American television personalities--United States--Interviews.

African American athletes--Interviews.

African American models--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Bill Overton attended the integrated English High School in Boston, Massachusetts. In his senior year, he captained the school's basketball team, and was elected class vice president. Overton recalls Edward G. Lloyd, Robert Cofield, Leon Coleman and other African American star athletes who played at Boston high schools during the 1960s. Upon graduation, Overton received a football scholarship to McCook Junior College in McCook, Nebraska. While studying there, he lived in the Keystone Hotel, and played football for Coach Rex Grossard. He also dated a white girlfriend while living in Nebraska. As a junior, Overton transferred to Wake Forest College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. There, Overton and his teammates Robert Grant and Kenneth Henry were among the first black athletes in the Atlantic Coast Conference. He also studied debate with Professor Franklin R. Shirley. Overton saw 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner' in 1967; and, in 1975, played Sidney Poitier's role in a television pilot based on the film.

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Bill Overton played football at Wake Forest College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he befriended black athletes like Kenneth Henry, Robert Grant and Gil McGregor. He also pledged Alpha Sigma Phi Fraternity, and was the first black member of a white fraternity in the South. There were few African American women at Wake Forest College, and the stigma around interracial relationships made it difficult for Overton to date. After his senior football season, Overton signed a National Football League (NFL) contract with the Dallas Cowboys, but clashed with Coach Tom Landry and wide receiver Peter Gent, and was assigned to the farm team in Oklahoma. Overton left the Dallas Cowboys, and instead signed to play for the Kansas City Chiefs under Coach Hank Stram. His teammates included Willie Lanier, Mike Garrett and Curley

Culp. Overton also recalls his friend Freddie Summers, the first black quarterback at Wake Forest College, who was unsuccessful in the NFL after he was forced to change positions.

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:09 ?

Bill Overton left the Kansas City Chiefs for a more lucrative contract with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats of the Canadian Football League. However, he conflicted with the coach, Joe Restic, and quit football after he was traded to the Saskatchewan Roughriders. Overton moved to New York City, and became an agent at Pro Sports, Incorporated. He recruited graduates of historically black colleges, including football player Raymond Chester. Overton also became a model at the Black Beauty agency, and worked on campaigns for brands like Johnnie Walker. Then, he signed with the Ford Modeling Agency, where he worked for J.C. Penney and Sears, Roebuck and Co. At the same time, Overton studied at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute. He decided to pursue acting, and was represented by the William Morris Agency in Los Angeles, California. He appeared in television series like 'Footsteps' and 'Backstairs at the White House.' Overton was married twice, first to model Kathleen Bradley, and later to actress Jayne Kennedy.

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Bill Overton was an actor and model in New York City and Los Angeles, California during the 1970s. He was represented by agents Rick Nicita and Ronald Meyer of the William Morris Agency, and worked with successful models like Beverly Johnson, Julie Woodson, Renauld White and Rene Russo. In the early 1980s, Overton married Kathleen Bradley, who later became the first permanent black model on 'The Price Is Right.' They had one child, Cheyenne Overton, and later divorced. In 1985, Overton married actress Jayne Kennedy. During the 1980s, Overton continued to act, while also investing in real estate. He became interested in American media history; and, in 1997, exhibited a collection of photographs and newspapers from the 19th century at the Union Chapel in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. In 2002, Overton published a book, 'The Media: Shaping the Image of a People.' He also lectured on African Americans' portrayal in the media at historically black institutions like Piney Woods Country Life School and Tougaloo College.

Video Oral History Interview with Bill Overton, Section A2008\_073\_001\_006, TRT: 0:12:27 ?

Bill Overton talks about African Americans who made major achievements within the entertainment industry, including model Julie Woodson, actresses Jayne Kennedy and Jada Pinkett Smith, actor and filmmaker Denzel Washington and actor Terrence Howard. Overton also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon his legacy.