Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Benjamin Carson

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Benjamin Carson

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Carson,

Dates: July 12, 2010

Bulk Dates: 2010

Physical Description: 3 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:25:16).

Abstract: Neurosurgeon, medical director, foundation executive, and author Dr. Benjamin Carson (1951 - ) is known for his groundbreaking work in neurosurgery, particularly for the operation he performed in 1987 to separate infant conjoined twins who were attached at the head. Carson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 12, 2010, in Upperco, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2010_075

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Neurosurgeon, medical director, foundation executive and author Dr. Benjamin Solomon Carson, Sr. was born on September 18, 1951 in Detroit Michigan, to Sonya and Robert Solomon Carson. After the couple separated, Carson and his brother Curtis lived with their mother. Although she worked several jobs at a time, Sonya supported the family and played a tremendous role in shaping the lives of her sons. Upon seeing her sons’ poor performance in school, Sonya required them to read regularly and to present her with weekly book reports, although she herself only had a third grade education and had difficulty reading.

In 1969, Carson graduated with honors as the student “Most likely to succeed,” from Southwestern High School, a public school located in southwest Detroit, Michigan. During his early years, although Carson had improved his grades considerably, he had to overcome his temper. After an incident in which he almost stabbed a friend, Carson made up his mind to change his ways. Upon receiving his high school diploma, Carson attended Yale University, where he would meet his future wife, Lacena “Candy” Rustin. After graduating from Yale University with his B.A. degree in psychology in 1973, he went on to the University of Michigan School of Medicine. After receiving his M.D. degree in 1977, Carson trained at Johns Hopkins University, where he completed his internship in general surgery and his residency in neurological surgery. In 1983, Carson traveled to Perth, Australia to serve as a senior registrar in neurosurgery at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. A year later, he returned to Johns Hopkins and by the following year was named Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery. In 1987, through a ground-breaking surgical procedure, Carson successfully separated conjoined twins who were attached at the head.

Outside of his work as a world-renowned surgeon, Carson has been civically active. Using his own life story as a
background, Carson has written four motivational books, which include: "Gifted Hands" in 1990, "The Big Picture" in 2000, "Think Big" in 2006, and "Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk" in 2007. The first of these works served as the inspiration for a film of the same title, in which Cuba Gooding, Jr. plays the role of Carson. Carson has also created three foundations—the Carson Scholars Fund, the Ben Carson Reading Project, and Angels of the Operating Room. He serves on the board of directors of the Kellogg Company and Costco Wholesale Corporation. In 2008, President George W. Bush presented Carson with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

Carson and his wife have three sons, Murray Nedlands, Benjamin Solomon, Jr. and Rhoeyce Harrington.

Dr. Benjamin Carson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 12, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Benjamin Carson was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 12, 2010, in Upperco, Maryland, and was recorded on 3 Betacam SP videocassettes. Neurosurgeon, medical director, foundation executive, and author Dr. Benjamin Carson (1951 - ) is known for his groundbreaking work in neurosurgery, particularly for the operation he performed in 1987 to separate infant conjoined twins who were attached at the head.

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:

  Carson, Benjamin
  Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Carson, Benjamin--Interviews.

African American neurosurgeons--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

African American physicians--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital

Johns Hopkins Hospital

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

CivicMakers

MediaMakers

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 Benjamin Carson, July 12, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding
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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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage, July 12, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Carson, Section A2010_075_001_001, TRT: 0:28:10 2010/07/12

Dr. Benjamin Carson begins by discussing his parents, Sonya Copeland and Robert Carson, who were both born and raised in Chattanooga. One of fourteen children, Sonya dropped out of school in the third grade and, at the age of thirteen, married Carson, a Baptist minister. The couple moved to Detroit, Michigan where he worked at the Cadillac automobile plant. The family was comfortable financially until Robert Carson became addicted to drugs. The couple separated, forcing Sonya to work three jobs to support her children. Dr. Carson and his older brother, Curtis, spent most of their childhood in Detroit except for a year living with his mother's sister in the poor Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. He attended a poorly run Seventh Day Adventist school, which left him behind academically when they returned to Detroit. Concerned with her son's scholastic performance, his mother required them to read books and to write book reports.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.
African American families--Massachusetts--Boston.
African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Massachusetts--Boston.
General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists--Education.
African Americans--Books and reading.
Single parents.
Substance abuse.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Carson, Section A2010_075_001_002, TRT: 0:28:08 2010/07/12

Dr. Benjamin Carson talks about his youth in Detroit. He realized that he did not receive an adequate education in school and needed to augment his learning by talking to teachers after school or visiting the city's great cultural institutions. He stresses how important books were in showing him that there was a way out of poverty. By the age of twelve, he was at the top of his class and, at Southwestern High School, he was the laboratory assistant for the science classes. Carson discusses his violent temper, which led to him almost killing a friend. A turning point in his life, he used the Bible to manage his anger. Another major influence was the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) program, where he rose to the rank of full colonel by his senior year. After he graduated from high school in 1969, he attended Yale University, majoring in psychology.
Dr. Benjamin Carson discusses his years as an undergraduate at Yale University, studying psychology under Anna Freud, Erik Erikson, Ruth Day, Jay Braun and H.H. Wasserman. After graduating in 1973, he enrolled at the University of Michigan Medical School where he planned to study psychiatry. However, at the end of his first year, he decided to switch to neurosurgery. After medical school, Carson decided to do his surgical training at Johns Hopkins University. Carson recalls meeting Vivien Thomas, the pioneering African American surgical technician, at Johns Hopkins. Thomas made a special effort to speak with and encourage young black surgeons. Carson occasionally faced prejudice on the ward but chose not to dwell on these experiences. Halfway through medical school, Carson married Candy Rustin, who he had met at Yale. Candy Carson and their three sons, Murray, Benjamin and Rhoeyce, play in a string quartet called the Carson Four.