

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Samuel Williamson

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Williamson, Samuel P., 1949-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 22, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:33:31).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Atmospheric scientist Samuel Williamson (1949 - ) was appointed as the Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1998. In 2010, Williamson received the Presidential Rank Award and the NOAA Distinguished Career Award. Williamson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 22, 2013, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_142
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Atmospheric scientist Samuel P. Williamson was born on March 5, 1949, in Somerville, Tennessee to the late Julius Williamson, Jr. and Izoula Smith. He graduated from W.P. Ware High School in 1967. Williamson received his B.S. degree in mathematics from Tennessee State University in 1971 and his B.S. degree in meteorology from North Carolina State University in 1972. He went on to earn his M.A. degree in management from Webster University in 1976. From

1996 to 1997, Williamson was a visiting Executive Fellow at the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government where he explored national security issues involving science, technology, and public policy.

In 1971, Williamson was hired as an elementary mathematics teacher in the Fayette County School System in Tennessee. Later in 1971, he began his atmospheric science career as a weather officer in the U.S. Air Force's Air Weather Service. In 1977, Williamson joined the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). For more than twelve years, he was NOAA's principal planner and ultimately the Director of the Joint System Program Office for the Next Generation Weather Radar (NEXRAD) WSR-88D, Doppler Weather Radar System through the design, development and initial deployment of this first major joint program among three Federal departments—the Departments of Commerce, Defense, and Transportation. Later, as a Senior Staff Associate for the National Science Foundation, Williamson enhanced science education. In his role as a senior advisor to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Science, he helped shape the legislative agenda for science, space, and technology policy. In 1998, Williamson was appointed as the Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research. As the Federal Coordinator, he is accountable to the U.S. Congress and the Office of Management and Budget for systematic coordination and cooperation among 15 Federal departments, independent agencies, and executive offices with meteorology programs or interests to ensure the Federal government provides the best possible weather information and user services to the Nation. Under his leadership, significant advances were made in the areas of aviation weather, space weather, wildland fire weather, weather information for surface transportation, advanced modeling and data assimilation, and tropical cyclone research and operations.

Williamson is a member of the American Meteorological Society, the Montgomery College Foundation Board, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and the National Guard Association. He also serves on the Committee for the Environment, Natural Resources, and Sustainability (CENRS) of the National Science and Technology Council.

Williamson is a recipient of the Presidential Rank Award (2010), the NOAA Distinguished Career Award (2010), the NOAA Bronze Medal (1996), and the National Guard Association of the United States Garde Nationale Trophy (1993). In 2006, Williamson was elected as a Fellow of the African Scientific Institute.

Samuel P. Williamson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 22, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Samuel Williamson was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 22, 2013, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Atmospheric scientist Samuel Williamson (1949 - ) was appointed as the Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 1998. In 2010, Williamson received the Presidential Rank Award and the NOAA Distinguished Career Award.

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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:**

Williamson, Samuel P., 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Williamson, Samuel P., 1949---Interviews

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African American scientists--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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## **Occupations:**

Atmospheric Scientist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers

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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 Samuel Williamson, May 22, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## **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).

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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 Samuel Williamson, Section A2013\_142\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:49 2013/05/22

Samuel Williamson describes his family's background. Williamson's mother, Izoula Smith Williamson, was born in 1924 in Somerville, Fayette County, Tennessee. She attended Fayette County Training School until the eleventh grade, and took the General Educational Development (GED) test later in her life. Izoula Williamson entered the workforce at a clothing company in Somerville and Whiteville, Tennessee, and then worked as a steward and chef at Wyler's Development Center, a state correctional facility, until 1989. Williamson's father, Samuel Williamson, Sr., was also born in 1924 in

Somerville, Tennessee. Williamson describes his father's generous personality, and his aspirations of running a large farming business. He talks about his father's spirituality, his service as a deacon at his family's church, his success as a businessman operating grocery stores and a restaurant in Somerville, and his employment as a maintenance operator at a state government facility in Arlington, Tennessee.

African American families.

African American mothers--Tennessee.

African American fathers--Tennessee.

Correctional institutions--Employees.

Spirituality.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section A2013\_142\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:27 2013/05/22

Samuel Williamson was raised in a family of four children, in Somerville, Tennessee, where his family had established roots. He talks about how his parents met and married in 1946, while his father was in the U.S. Army. He describes his father's service in World War II as a quartermaster on the Red Ball Express and as a sharpshooter. In this section of the interview, Williamson also talks about his mother's education, his parents' personalities, his close relationship with them, and their last years together before their deaths. Williamson also provides a detailed account of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Childhood--Tennessee.

African American families--Tennessee.

World War, 1939-1945--African American soldiers.

African American parents--Attitudes.

United States. Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section A2013\_142\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:51 2013/05/22

Samuel Williamson attended Glade Spring Elementary School until the third grade and then went to Jefferson Elementary School, which was a centralized school for African American students in Somerville, Tennessee.

Williamson attended high school at Fayette County Training School. In this section of the interview, Williamson describes his experience in school, his teachers, and his talent for mathematics. He also describes his memories of growing up in Somerville, where his family attended Pulliam Chapel Missionary Baptist Church and Travelers Rest Missionary Baptist Church. In 1967, Williamson enrolled at Tennessee State University, where he received an Educational Opportunity Grant. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) there. Williamson recalls Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in April of 1968, and his experience on Tennessee State University's campus that evening.

Education--Tennessee.

Mathematical ability in children.

Childhood--Tennessee.

Baptists--Tennessee.

Tennessee State University.

United States. Air Force ROTC.

King, Martin Luther Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section  
A2013\_142\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:23 2013/05/22

In 1971, Samuel Williamson earned his B.S. degree in mathematics at Tennessee State University. He talks about the teachers who influenced him, and well known athletes, including Jose Gilliam, who graduated from there. He also talks about getting married in 1970, and starting a family. In 1971, Williamson was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force, and was selected to join the meteorology program at North Carolina State University. He talks about his experience there, his mentor, Allen Weber, and his love of meteorology. Williamson's first call of active duty took him to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina. He describes his family's experience with racism while trying to find a place to live near the base. He was later stationed at Charleston Air Force Base, where he was mentored by his supervising officers. Williamson describes his positive

experience there, and his meeting with President Jimmy Carter.

Tennessee State University.

Mentoring in education.

Marriage.

United States. Air Force.

North Carolina State University.

Meteorology.

Seymour Johnson Air Force Base (N.C.).

Carter, Jimmy, 1924-.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section A2013\_142\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:41 2013/05/22

In 1976, Samuel Williamson received his M.A. degree in management from Webster University. In 1977, after completing his tour of active duty in the U.S. Air Force, he joined the National Weather Service, where he worked on the automated field operation services technology that the agency acquired. In 1978, Williamson moved to the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Oklahoma, where he became the principal planner of the NEXRAD (Next Generation Weather Radar) Joint System Program, and its deputy director in 1979. Williamson describes his contributions to the NEXRAD Program, and talks about his mentors, Richard Hellgren and Colonel William Barney. Williamson discusses the uses of Doppler radar technology for weather monitoring and airplane control, explains the phenomenon of wind shear, and gives his perspective on weather warning systems. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in 2001, and received the Presidential Rank Award in 2010.

Webster University.

United States. National Weather Service.

National Severe Storms Laboratory.

Doppler radar.

Hellgren, Richard Karl.

Meteorology.

United States. Air Force.



Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section  
A2013\_142\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:43 2013/05/22

In 1998, Samuel Williamson was appointed as Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In this section of the interview, Williamson describes his contributions to creating atmospheric and environmental transport dispersion models, improving traffic reports for increasing the safety of highway travel, improving predictions of the development and impact of storms and hurricanes, providing recommendations for better ways of dealing with wildfires in the western part of the United States, and collaborating with federal agencies to monitor the impact of solar radiations. Williamson also discusses the need for better weather warning systems and shelter infrastructure, and increased awareness on how to respond to severe weather warnings. He also provides a meteorological explanation for why the United States is susceptible to tornadoes.

United States. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Weather forecasting.

Environmental sciences.

Weather.

Meteorological services.

Environmental monitoring.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section  
A2013\_142\_001\_007, TRT: 7:29:16 2013/05/22

During the 1996-1997 academic year, Samuel Williamson was a Visiting Executive Fellow at the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, where he studied and researched national security issues that involved science, technology, and public policy. In this section of the interview, Williamson reflects upon his career at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and in the U.S. Air Force, and talks about the mentors who influenced his life and career. He also reflects upon his legacy, describes his hopes and concerns

for the African American community and talks about his family.

Harvard University.

Science and state--United States.

United States. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

United States. Air Force.

Mentoring.

Reminiscing.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Williamson, Section  
A2013\_142\_001\_008, TRT: 8:05:21 2013/05/22

In this final section of the interview, Samuel Williamson shares how he would like to be remembered. He also describes his photographs.

Reminiscing.

Photographs.