

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Byron Williams

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Williams, Byron C., 1959- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, |
| Dates: | November 4, 2013 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2013 |
| Physical Description: | 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:18:07). |
| Abstract: | Pastor and author Reverend Byron Williams (1959 -) was called to serve as pastor of the Resurrection Community Church in 2002. He is the author of <i>1963: Year of Hope and Hostility</i> (2013), and the he only pastor in the United States who a syndicated columnist. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 4, 2013, in Berkeley, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2013_252 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

In 2002, Williams was called to serve as pastor of the Resurrection Community Church. He regularly contributed to the *The Huffington Post*, and wrote a twice-weekly column on politics and social issues for the Bay Area News Group which includes the *Oakland Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, and *Contra Costa Times*. The column, which appeared in thirty publications across the United States, was considered for a Pulitzer Prize. Williams was the only pastor in the United States who also authored a syndicated column. Williams has write articles and op-ed

pieces for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Los Angeles Daily News*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Christianity Today*, *UK Guardian*, *Tikkun Magazine*, and *Public Theology*.

He is the author of, *Strip Mall Patriotism: Moral Reflections on the Iraq War*, a series of essays covering a four-year span on America's enterprise in Iraq, and, *1963: Year of Hope and Hostility* (2013). Williams lectured throughout the United States and appeared on numerous television and radio news programs, including CNN, MSNBC, ABC Radio, Fox News, and National Public Radio.

Williams served as a member of People for the American Way's African-American Religious Affairs. In 2011, he was appointed as co-chair of the National Black Justice Coalition Religious Affairs Committee, and later served on the board of directors for Death Penalty Focus. In 2010 and 2011, Williams' work was nationally recognized by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which nominated him as "Columnist of the Year."

Reverend Byron C. Williams was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 4, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Byron Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 4, 2013, in Berkeley, California, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Pastor and author Reverend Byron Williams (1959 -) was called to serve as pastor of the Resurrection Community Church in 2002. He is the author of *1963: Year of Hope and Hostility* (2013), and the he only pastor in the United States who a syndicated columnist.

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:

Williams, Byron C., 1959-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Williams, Byron C., 1959---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Pastor

Author

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers|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 Reverend Byron Williams, November 4, 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).

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 Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_001, TRT: 1:29:46 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams was born on September 22, 1959 in Berkeley, California. Williams' mother, Faith Loyce Prather, was born in Waco, Texas in 1942. She moved to California as a child and attended McClymonds High School in Oakland. Williams' maternal grandmother attended Prairie View A&M University and taught yoga in California. Williams believes the oppression in the South took a toll upon her mental health. Williams' father, Bruce Williams, was born in 1931 in Mexia, Texas. Williams' paternal family was originally from Omaha, Nebraska but moved to Texas and changed their last name after his grandfather killed a white man. Williams' father fought in the Korean War; and then, in California, worked at the same naval air base as Williams' maternal grandfather, through whom he met Williams' mother. The two married but divorced in 1969. Williams looks like his mother and describes his father's outgoing personality. Williams has two younger siblings; his father has always been kind to Williams' half-sister.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_002, TRT: 2:28:56 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams grew up in a working class neighborhood in Berkeley, California. He remembers playing with his friends in the neighborhood until the street lights came on, which was his curfew. He recalls his earliest childhood memory of a fight between his parents. Williams began school at Longfellow School in Berkeley, and transferred to the newly integrated John Muir Elementary School partway through the first grade. He recalls teachers and memories from both; his parents were very involved in the school. After Muir, he attended Columbus School and Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. He recalls a play he wrote in the seventh grade.

He then went to Albany High School in Albany, California. Williams was acutely aware of politics from a young age and recalls the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. He recalls his parents' political views and being forbidden from watching 'Death Valley Days' after Reagan won the California governorship in 1966.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_003, TRT: 3:28:28 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams attended Albany High School in Albany, California, where he wrote for the school newspaper, competed on the debate team, acted in plays, and played basketball. He recalls playing against Earvin "Magic" Johnson in a basketball tournament as a teen. Williams talks about his favorite baseball players, including Willie Mays, and talks about his mentors in high school. Williams earned good grades in high school and his father was supportive of his interest in basketball. Williams was recruited to play basketball at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the late 1970s. Williams left after a year and went to Wenatchee Valley College in Washington for a year before transferring to Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho. At Idaho, he was a starter on the basketball team for two years. He talks about his social life at Idaho and only meeting other African Americans through sports. He graduated in 1983. Williams recalls the Jonestown Massacre in 1978, in which more than 900 people died.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_004, TRT: 4:30:36 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams attended Idaho University in Pocatello, Idaho for his final years of college and studied political science and macro-economics. Williams talks about a professor who influenced him, Steve Caan. In 1983, he graduated and was drafted to play professional basketball for what was then known as the Washington Bullets. He recalls notable players and being cut from the team. After being cut, he worked for the Pacific Stock Exchange as a floor runner. He worked his way up to floor trader before the 1989 stock market crash. Williams volunteered for the Democratic Party in San Francisco,

California where he ghost-wrote for Jerry Brown. He was soon hired by the California Medical Association as development director. In 1998, Williams began working for Pacific Gas & Electric Company, but quit in 2000 to write and start a church. Williams describes his turn to religion and decision to start a church based on the notion of inconvenient love.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_005, TRT: 5:29:21 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams earned his M.A. degree with an emphasis on liberation theology from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, in 1997. Williams defines liberation theology and its relationship to American slavery. Williams talks about Howard Thurman's book 'Jesus and the Disinherited' and explains how theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. have influenced his philosophy. Williams developed the concept of inconvenient love with another pastor, Michael A. Smith. He describes the concept and its place in his church, Resurrection Community Church, which opened in 2001. Initially, the church's congregation was largely drawn from people he already knew, however it grew with the popularity of his columns. Williams talks about the flawed public narrative of American exceptionalism and explains his position on gay marriage. He talks about becoming a syndicated columnist, first writing for the Bay Area News Group and later for the Huffington Post.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_006, TRT: 6:28:40 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams talks about his church, Resurrection Community Church, in Berkeley, California. At the time of the interview, Resurrection was predominantly black. Though the church has grown since it was founded, it still faces challenges to its growth. Williams describes the community's care for one another. The church holds a youth culinary academy, runs a literacy project, and allows other nonprofits to rent space. Williams gives his opinion on the 2008 presidential election of HistoryMaker Barack Obama. In 2010, he appeared on MSNBC's 'Debating the Black Agenda.'

Williams talks about the importance of providing subsidies to small businesses and his experience serving on the board of the National Black Justice Coalition. At the time of the interview, he wrote two books: 'Strip Mall Patriotism: Moral Reflections on the Iraq War' and '1963: A Year of Hope and Hostility.' He talks about how the important political events of 1963 were captured on television and led to the events of 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Byron Williams, Section A2013_252_001_007, TRT: 7:22:20 2013/11/04

Reverend Byron Williams reflects upon the events of 1963 written about in his book, '1963: A Year of Hope & Hostility,' and the people he interviewed for the book. He talks about Sidney Poitier's role in 'Lilies of the Field,' for which he won an Academy Award. Williams also talks about the pacification of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy and the potency of segregationist George Wallace's politics in American politics over the decades. Williams talks about his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his family and his plans for future books. He reflects upon his life, his success, his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.