

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geoffrey Canada

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Canada, Geoffrey
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Canada,
Dates:	December 12, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	3 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:24:15).
Abstract:	Nonprofit executive Geoffrey Canada (1952 -) founded the Harlem Children's Zone, an initiative following the academic careers of children in a 24 block area of Harlem. Canada was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 12, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_144
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive Geoffrey Canada was born on January 13, 1952 in South Bronx, New York to Mary Canada and McAlister Canada. Canada graduated from Wyandanch Memorial High School in Wyandanch, New York in 1970; and earned his B.A. degree in psychology and sociology from Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine in 1974. Canada received his M.S. degree in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1975.

Canada was hired as director of the Robert White School in Boston, Massachusetts in 1975. In 1983, he founded the Chang Moo Kwan Martial Arts School, and became the education director and program director of the truancy prevention program at the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families. He was promoted to president and chief executive officer of the Rheedlen Center in 1990. Under his leadership, Rheedlen opened the first Beacon School at the Countee Cullen Community Center, and launched the Neighborhood Gold program, the Harlem Peacemakers Program, and the Harlem Children's Zone initiative. The Rheedlen Center changed its name to Harlem Children's Zone in 2002, and opened its first charter school in 2004. Impressed by Canada's success with The Harlem Children's Zone model, President Barack Obama announced in 2008 that he planned to replicate the program in thirty cities across the country. In 2014, Canada stepped down as chief executive officer of the Harlem Children's Zone, retaining the title of president, he was succeeded by Anne Williams Isom who became chief executive officer.

Canada authored two books: *Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America* and *Reaching Up for Manhood: Transforming the Live of Boys in America*. He was also the main subject of the 2010 film *Waiting for Superman*. Canada served on multiple boards for organizations including the Black Community Crusade for Children at the Children's Defense Fund, the board of directors of the Fund for the City of New York and Foundation Center as well as in the capacity of co-chair of the New York Commission on Economic Opportunity in 2006, and the New York State Governor's Children's Cabinet Advisory Board in 2007. He received multiple awards for his work including the Heinz Award in the Human Condition and the National Civil Rights Museum Freedom Award.

Canada and his wife, Yvonne Canada have four children: Melina, Jerry, Bruce, and Geoffrey, Jr.

Geoffrey Canada was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 12, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geoffrey Canada was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 12, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 3 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit executive Geoffrey Canada (1952 -) founded the Harlem Children's Zone, an initiative following the academic careers of children in a 24 block area of Harlem.

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:

Canada, Geoffrey

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Canada, Geoffrey--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Education Administrator

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Geoffrey Canada, December 12, 2016. 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).

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 Geoffrey Canada, Section A2016_144_001_001, TRT: 1:29:06 ?

Geoffrey Canada was born on January 13, 1952 in the Bronx, New York to Mary Williams Canada and McCalister Canada. Canada's paternal ancestors were enslaved by the white Cannaday family in Virginia. His maternal great-

grandmother, Mary Williams, was born a slave in Kinston, North Carolina. His maternal great-grandfather, Reuben Pearson, descended from slaves, and owned land in Kinston. Canada's maternal grandparents, Lydia Pearson Williams and Reverend Leonard Williams, Sr., met in Kinston. Together, they moved to New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where Canada's mother was born. His parents met and married in Harlem. His father was an alcoholic, and left when Canada was three years old. His mother worked as a secretary to support the family, and they also relied upon welfare. Later, his mother studied at the City College of New York and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Canada also recalls tracing his lineage with scholar Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. on the show, 'Finding Your Roots.'

Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Canada, Section A2016_144_001_002, TRT: 2:30:20 ?

Geoffrey Canada and his three brothers were raised by their mother, Mary Williams Canada, in the South Bronx, New York. They were frequently exposed to street violence, and were forced to fight the neighborhood kids to survive. While their mother was at work, Canada and his brothers were left in the care of their maternal grandparents, Lydia Pearson Williams and Leonard Williams, Sr. At this point, Canada remembers the early influence of his grandmother's religious teachings and his grandfather's strong moral character. Canada's grandparents eventually purchased a home in Wyandanch, New York, and he and his brothers moved there to attend Wyandanch Memorial High School. Later in life, Canada visited the plantation where his paternal ancestors were enslaved in Virginia. He also describes his short memoir, 'Cherries for My Grandma,' which was published in The New York Times; and remembers his older brother, John Canada, who died of a drug overdose while serving in the U.S. military.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Canada, Section A2016_144_001_003, TRT: 3:24:49 ?

Geoffrey Canada began his education at P.S. 99, Dimitrious Myers School in the Bronx, New York. There, he was placed in the school's advanced track, and excelled academically. Upon entering J.H.S. 133, he tested into the gifted class, which was the first of twenty-four academically ranked groups. At this point in the interview, Canada talks about the problems created by the academic tracking system. During the ninth grade, he performed poorly on New York City's high school entrance examination, and was assigned to attend the local Morris High School, which had a reputation for violence. Instead, he moved to his maternal grandparents' home in Wyandanch, New York, where he studied at Wyandanch Memorial High School from 1968. Canada also remembers the influence of Michael Adams, an older teenager who encouraged him to focus on his academics, and protected him from violence in the South Bronx. Later, Canada hired Adams to work as a basketball coach at the Harlem Children's Zone.