

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with ReShonda Tate Billingsley

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Billingsley, ReShonda Tate
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley,
Dates:	February 1, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:31:45).
Abstract:	Author and journalist ReShonda Tate Billingsley (1969 -) served as a reporter and news anchor in Texas and Oklahoma, and was a national bestselling author of over forty fiction, nonfiction and teen fiction books. Billingsley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 1, 2017, in Washington, D.C., District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_014
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author and journalist ReShonda Tate Billingsley was born on September 7, 1969, in Kansas City, Missouri. Billingsley graduated from Madison High School in Houston, Texas in 1987, and attended the University of Texas at Austin, where she earned her B.A. degree in broadcast journalism in 1991.

Billingsley began her career in 1993 as an associate producer for KTRK-TV, an ABC-affiliate in Houston, Texas. After a year at KTRK, Billingsley moved to the NBC-affiliate KJAC-TV in Port Arthur, Texas, as an anchor, reporter and talk

show host. In 1996, she accepted a position in Houston, Texas as a reporter for KPRC-TV, the NBC-affiliate. From 1997-2003, Billingsley was a reporter and anchor for the NBC-affiliated KFOR-TV in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In 2003, she returned to Houston as a reporter for KRIV-TV, the Fox-affiliate, where she remained until 2007. Billingsley published her first book in 2001 *My Brother's Keeper*, which was picked up by publishing company Simon & Schuster the following year. She became a National Bestselling Author of over forty fiction, non-fiction, and teen fiction books. Billingsley has also served as a reporter and editor for the *Houston Defender* since 1993. She served as a host and producer for KPFT's *From Cover to Cover* literary talk show from 2009 to 2013, and KTSU's *The Sista Xchange* from 2011 to 2014. She, and fellow Simon & Schuster author Victoria Christopher Murray, co-founded Brown Girl Books in 2014. Her books *The Devil is a Lie* and *Let the Church Say Amen* were adapted into television movies for TV One and BET.

Billingsley has also served as a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Jack & Jill of America, and the Durham Library board. Billingsley received the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literature in 2012 for her book, *Say Amen, Again*, and was nominated in 2013 for *The Secret She Kept*, which was adapted into a television movie for TV One. She was nominated for the award once again in 2015 for *Mama's Boy*.

Billingsley and her husband, Dr. Miron Billingsley have three children; Mya, Morgan and Myles.

ReShonda Tate Billingsley was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 1, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 1, 2017, in Washington, D.C., District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Author and journalist ReShonda Tate Billingsley (1969 -) served as a reporter and news anchor in Texas and Oklahoma, and was a national bestselling author of over forty fiction, nonfiction and teen fiction books.

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:

Billingsley, ReShonda Tate

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Billingsley, ReShonda Tate--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Journalist

Author

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 ReShonda Tate Billingsley, February 1, 2017. 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 ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_001, TRT: 1:23:30 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley was born on September 7, 1969 in Kansas City, Missouri to Nancy Kilgore Blacknell and Bruce Tate. Her maternal great-grandparents, Delcie Hicks and Aaron Hicks, were sharecroppers in Smackover, Arkansas, and eventually purchased their land. Billingsley's maternal grandmother, Pearley Hicks Kilgore, worked as a domestic, while her mother attended Smackover Colored High School. She studied business at Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, but left early to marry Billingsley's father. He was born in Norphlet, Arkansas to Naomi Burns Tate and Horace Tate, who worked at the Lion Oil Company. Billingsley's family briefly lived in Kansas City, Missouri, where her father worked in construction. After returning to Smackover, he opened a supper club called Masseys. Billingsley was an avid reader, and enjoyed listening to her father's stories. After her parents' divorce, she moved to Houston, Texas, where she attended Petersen Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_002, TRT: 2:29:00 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley grew up in Houston, Texas, where she attended Richard Dowling Middle School and James Madison High School. She enjoyed writing fiction from an early age, and published her first story in True Confessions magazine at fifteen years old. She also

enjoyed watching the news, and admired newscasters Carole Simpson and Melanie Lawson. Under the mentorship of her history teacher, Billingsley graduated near the top of her class in 1987, and received a full scholarship to attend the University of Texas at Austin. There, she initially struggled with her coursework, but gradually improved her grades. She was influenced by her black history teacher, Professor George C. Wright, and joined the black student union and the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She also changed her major to broadcast journalism, and worked as a news reporter on Austin's KAZI Radio. Upon graduating in 1991, Billingsley was hired at the National Enquirer bureau in Lantana, Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_003, TRT: 3:28:13 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley started her career at the National Enquirer, and then joined The Houston Defender. There, she wrote an expose on the underrepresentation of African Americans in the Houston television market, which led her to become an associate producer at KTRK-TV. After two years, she transferred to KJAC-TV in Beaumont-Port Arthur, Texas, where she worked as a morning anchor and talk show host. In 1996, Billingsley became a reporter trainee at Houston's KPRC-TV, and was then hired as a reporter at KFOR-TV in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Eventually, she was promoted to weekend anchor. In 1999, Billingsley self-published her first book, 'My Brother's Keeper,' which sold in bookstores nationwide. It earned the Black Writers Alliance Gold Pen Award for best new author, and was republished in 2003 by Simon and Schuster, Inc. In 2004, Billingsley's novel, 'Let the Church Say Amen,' was released as Christian fiction, which was controversial because of the inclusion of a gay character and some adult language.

Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_004, TRT: 4:27:32 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley's book 'Let the Church Say Amen' sold over one hundred thousand copies, and expanded to become a trilogy with the publication of 'Everybody Say Amen' and 'Say Amen Again.' Due to the faith based themes of her books, Billingsley's novels were

often categorized as Christian fiction, although she tried to avoid that classification because of its limitations. In 2005, she published her first non-fiction book, 'Help! I've Turned into My Mother.' Billingsley also wrote books for teenagers like 'Nothing But Drama,' 'Getting Even' and 'Fair-Weather Friends,' which appealed to both boys and girls. In 2009, she published 'Friends 'til the End' and 'The Devil is a Lie,' followed by 'Holy Rollers.' Billingsley published 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find' in 2011, and 'The Secret She Kept' in 2012. In addition to her writing career, Billingsley acted alongside Jill Marie Jones in 'Marriage Material,' a play by Je'Caryous Johnson. She talks about balancing parenthood with her writing process.

Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_005, TRT: 5:31:37 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley's published works included 'The Motherhood Diaries,' 'A Family Affair,' 'What's Done in the Dark' and 'The Perfect Mistress.' In 2012, Billingsley appeared on 'Bethenny' and 'Dr. Drew' to address a viral photo that she posted of her daughter on Facebook as punishment for inappropriate behavior on social media. In 2013, Billingsley's novel, 'Let the Church Say Amen,' was adapted into a movie by director Regina King. Her novel, 'The Secret She Kept,' was also adapted to film, and aired on TV One in 2016. Billingsley was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame, and was a five time winner of the Spirit in the Words competition. She also received the African American Literary Award for Best Christian Fiction. At this point, Billingsley reflects upon her concerns for the African American community, as well as her writing career and creative process. She also talks about her family; her publishing company, Brown Girls Books; and her favorite contemporary writers.

Video Oral History Interview with ReShonda Tate Billingsley, Section A2017_014_001_006, TRT: 6:11:53 2017/02/01

ReShonda Tate Billingsley narrates her photographs.