

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jamye Coleman Williams

Overview of the Collection

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Williams, Jamye Coleman, 1918- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jamye Coleman Williams, |
| Dates: | August 13, 2003 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2003 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:19). |
| Abstract: | Communications professor and church leader Jamye Coleman Williams (1918 - 2022) was the first woman to serve as a general officer in the A.M.E. church and later helped Vashti McKenzie win election as the A.M.E. church's first female bishop. She is also a former professor at Tennessee State University, and served as department head. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 13, 2003, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2003_187 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on December 15, 1918, in Louisville, Kentucky, to an A.M.E. minister and a religious writer, Williams grew up in Kentucky and earned her B.A. with honors in English from Wilberforce University in 1938. The following year, she received an M.A. in English from Fisk University. Over the next twenty years, Williams taught at four A.M.E. colleges-Edward Waters College, Shorter College, Morris Brown College and Wilberforce University. In 1959, she completed her Ph.D. in speech communication at the Ohio State University and that fall joined the faculty of Tennessee State University. She became a full professor of communications and in 1973 took over as head of the department, serving in that capacity until her retirement in 1987.

At the same time that her academic career took off, Williams began to ascend the leadership ranks of the A.M.E. Church. She served as a delegate to the A.M.E. General Conference in 1964 and became a board member of the National Council of Churches in 1968. From 1976 to 1984, she was an alternate member of the A.M.E. Church's Judicial Council, serving as president of the 13th District Lay Organization from 1977 until 1985. At the 1984 General Conference, Williams was named editor of *The AME Church Review*, the oldest African American literary journal. She held that post for eight years. Williams also has paved the way for others in the A.M.E., helping Vashti McKenzie win election as the first female A.M.E. bishop.

During her forty-five years in Nashville, Williams was active in her community, serving on several interdenominational organizations, community groups and civic committees. She worked as a member of the NAACP's Executive Committee and in 1999 received the organization's Presidential Award. Williams married her husband, McDonald Williams, in 1943. They have one daughter, one grandson, and two great-granddaughters. Williams resides with her husband in Atlanta.

Williams passed away on January 19, 2022

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jamye Coleman Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 13, 2003, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Communications professor and church leader Jamye Coleman Williams (1918 - 2022) was the first woman to serve as a general officer in the A.M.E. church and later helped Vashti McKenzie win election as the A.M.E. church's first female bishop. She is also a former professor at Tennessee State University, and served as department 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:

Williams, Jamye Coleman, 1918-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Versfelt, Porter (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Williams, Jamye Coleman, 1918- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

African Methodist Episcopal Church

Occupations:

Church Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Jamye Coleman Williams, August 13, 2003. 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 Jamye Coleman Williams, Section A2003_187_001_001, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Jamye Coleman Williams was born on December 15, 1918 in Louisville, Kentucky. Her mother, Jamye Harris Coleman, was born in 1893 in Mayfield,

Kentucky and loved to write plays, poetry and music. She met Williams' father, Frederick Douglass Coleman, in Louisville when he was performing in a church play she wrote. Williams' father was born in 1892 in Harrisburg, Kentucky and fought in World War I. Williams and her family lived in many different towns in Kentucky and Tennessee due to her father's job as an A.M.E. preacher. Williams loved to read as a child. She attended grade school in Midway and Covington, Kentucky. She remembers walking through the woods to get to school, school trips to Cincinnati, Ohio, visiting her aunt in Louisville during the summer and the dramatic clubs her mother organized. Williams attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky where her music teacher advised her to add a "Y" to her name. From a young age, Williams planned to attend Wilberforce University in Ohio.

Video Oral History Interview with Jamye Coleman Williams, Section A2003_187_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Jamye Coleman Williams was given a scholarship to Wilberforce University in Ohio by Bishop Reverdy Cassius Ransom. Ransom would later pay her salary when she joined the faculty of Wilberforce and she developed a close relationship with the Bishop and his second wife. Williams talks about the history of Wilberforce University and the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church. At Wilberforce, Williams majored in English, was active in student activities and knew Grace Woodson and Hallie Q. Brown. After graduating from college in 1938 she earned a M.A. degree in English from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and taught at Edward Waters College in Florida and Shorter College in Arkansas before being hired by Wilberforce's English department in 1942, the same year as her husband, McDonald Williams, and as Wilberforce president Dr. Charles Wesley. Williams describes the tension between the university and the State of Ohio during the 1940s and explains how her mother cultivated her public speaking skills.

Video Oral History Interview with Jamye Coleman Williams, Section A2003_187_001_003, TRT: 0:28:37 ?

Jamye Coleman Williams served on the faculty of Wilberforce University in Ohio when the university split in 1947. Wilberforce's president, Dr. John Wesley, was fired and went on to start Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. The faculty of the liberal arts departments remained at Wilberforce, but the College of Education and Industrial Arts moved to Central State, including Leontyne Price who was a student in the music department. In 1956, Williams' husband was offered a job in Atlanta, Georgia at Morris Brown College. In Atlanta, Williams was the advisor to the NAACP Youth Council and watched Donald L. Hollowell argue a court case. The Williams moved to Nashville, Tennessee in 1958 to serve on the faculty of Tennessee State University. Williams also advised the NAACP Youth Council in Nashville. She talks about the activists at Fisk University including Diane Nash, James Lawson and HistoryMakers James Bevel and C.T. Vivian; and, talks about the first black president of Fisk, Charles S. Johnson.

Video Oral History Interview with Jamye Coleman Williams, Section A2003_187_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Jamye Coleman Williams was active in the Civil Rights Movement in Nashville, Tennessee during the 1960s. She recalls the march which followed the bombing of lawyer Z. Alexander Looby's house and the boycott that led to the desegregation of restaurants in Nashville. Williams taught at Tennessee State until she retired in 1988. She lists some of the outstanding students she taught, including HistoryMaker S. Allen Counter and Oprah Winfrey who delivered the

commencement address at TSU in 1987. Williams was elected the first woman major general officer of the A.M.E. Church in 1984. At the 2000 A.M.E. General Conference Williams introduced a resolution, which was read by HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Floyd Flake, to elect the first woman bishop in the A.M.E. Church-- HistoryMaker Vashti McKenzie was the first woman elected as an A.M.E. bishop. Williams' mother lived to be ninety-three years old and her husband's mother lived to be 102 years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Jamye Coleman Williams, Section A2003_187_001_005, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Jamye Coleman Williams failed to get her resolution to consider electing a woman as an A.M.E. Bishop passed by the 2000 A.M.E. General Conference. However, HistoryMaker Bishop Vashti McKenzie was still elected. Williams talks about her plans for the future, and describes her hopes for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. Williams also reflects upon her legacy and narrates her photographs.