

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Woodson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Woodson, Robert L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson,
Dates:	September 22, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:41:22).
Abstract:	Community development chief executive and social activist Robert Woodson (1937 -) created the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, to address issues of poverty. Woodson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 22, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_232
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Community activist Robert L. "Bob" Woodson has devoted his career to helping low-income people transcend their impoverished conditions. Born in Philadelphia on April 8, 1937, Woodson has used his own rise from poverty to assist him as the founder and president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (NCNE).

Woodson spent his early years in South Philadelphia before his father relocated their family to West Philadelphia in 1946. Shortly thereafter, his father died and Woodson's mother was overwhelmed by the task of being a single parent. Woodson became estranged from his mother, lost his self-confidence and dropped out of high school. At age seventeen, he joined the Air Force and turned his life around. Woodson earned his G.E.D. while in the service, going on to study mathematics at Cheyney University. Woodson then took a job at a juvenile jail and, as he began to identify with the kids in the jail, dedicated himself to helping them. He decided to go into social work, attending the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned an M.S.W.

Woodson, however, grew disenchanted with the bureaucratic restrictions and regulations of liberal anti-poverty programs. After working for the National Urban League, Woodson became a research fellow with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he learned effective techniques for self-empowerment. Because AEI emphasized theory more than direct action, Woodson left in 1981 to create NCNE, a grassroots research and demonstration program emphasizing the importance of empowerment and self-management as effective approaches for ending poverty.

For his contributions, Woodson received a prestigious "Genius Grant" from the MacArthur Foundation in 1990. He sits on the boards of the American Association of Enterprise Zones, the Commission on National and Community Service, and the Commonwealth Foundation. Woodson has also written extensively on issues of poverty and empowerment, including *The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today's Community Healers are Reviving Our Streets and Neighborhoods*. Woodson and his wife, Ellen, live in Silver Spring, Maryland. They have three children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Woodson was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 22, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community development chief executive and social activist Robert Woodson (1937 -) created the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, to address issues of poverty.

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:

Woodson, Robert L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Woodson, Robert L.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

Occupations:

Social Activist

Community Development Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Robert Woodson, September 22, 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 Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?
Social activist Robert L. Woodson begins by describing his family background.

He details his hardscrabble life in South Philadelphia as one of five children and a single mother, after his father died when he was nine years old. Woodson details the daily life in his all-black neighborhood in South Philadelphia and the close-knit ties among community members. Woodson also recalls his favorite childhood activities.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Social activist Robert L. Woodson describes his childhood and educational experiences in South Philadelphia. Woodson explains how he lacked support during his high school years, which led to poor academic performance. Woodson tells why he joined the Air Force, working at a missile base in Florida. While there, he had his first experiences living and working with whites. He describes the racial atmosphere on the base, including his first experiences with racism. He then explains his decision to attend Cheyney State University.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Social activist Robert L. Woodson talks about his time at Cheyney State University. He then speaks at length on the failure of black leadership in the black community. He details the plethora of ways America's black elite and upper middle class could intervene to change the course for the urban poor, but have not. Woodson also lays fault at the foot of poor blacks who blame white America for their lack of achievement and success. Throughout, Woodson stresses the need for self-determination.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Social activist Robert L. Woodson describes his work at a juvenile prison during college, and then details his split with the Civil Rights Movement, saying he felt that not enough was done to promote the rights of poor blacks. Woodson then examines the current gap between rich and poor African Americans and discusses the impact of Marcus Garvey. After reiterating his critique of the Civil Rights Movement, Woodson talks about his work with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Social activist Robert L. Woodson recalls his work with several organizations, including the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, the National Urban League, and the American Enterprise Institute. Woodson explains his disillusionment with the Democratic Party and liberal organizations, and talks about his shift to the right wing. Woodson shares his views on possible solutions to social problems in poor black neighborhoods and explains the importance of religion in his social activism. Finally, Woodson shares his hopes and concerns for the black community and considers his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Woodson, Section A2003_232_001_006, TRT: 0:15:42 ?

Social activist Robert L. Woodson considers how he would like to be remembered and narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.