

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Joseph Evans

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Evans, Joseph H. B. (Joseph Henry B.), 1915-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Evans,
Dates:	August 10, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:11:01).
Abstract:	Pastor Reverend Joseph Evans (1915 - 2008) is the first and only African American to hold the positions of both national secretary and president of a mainline church denomination in the United States, the United Church of Christ. Evans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 10, 2005, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_195
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend Joseph H. Evans, D.D., held the distinction of being the first and only African American to hold the positions of both Secretary and President of a mainline church denomination in the United States. Between 1967 and 1983, he was the national secretary of the United Church of Christ (UCC). Upon the sudden death of UCC president, Robert Moss, in 1976, Evans was named the third president of the UCC. He filled this position for one year, 1976 to 1977, and then returned to the secretariat position.

Evans was born on August 15, 1915 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The son of Etta Hill, a teacher, and Charles A. Evans, a postal worker, Evans grew up in Chicago and graduated from Englewood High School in 1933. During his youth, he was an active member of the Church of the Good Shepherd. In 1939, he received an A.B. degree from Western Michigan University and in 1942, a Masters of Divinity from Yale University's Divinity School. He was ordained into the UCC that same year.

Following a brief period as the leader of a church mission serving immigrants from Barbados in Brooklyn, New York, Evans served as the pastor of Grace Congregational Church in Harlem, New York from 1942 to 1946. At Grace Congregational, he met Harriette Clark whom he married in 1944. From 1946 to 1947, he served as the Associate General Secretary for the Connecticut Council of Churches, where he ministered to migrant tobacco farm workers and youth. In 1947, he was called to Mount Zion Church in Cleveland, Ohio, to serve as pastor until 1953. Then, he was called to his home church in Chicago to lead the Church of the Good Shepherd. While there, he earned his Doctorate of Divinity from the Chicago Theological Seminary. From 1960 to 1964, he served as president of the Urban League of Chicago. After serving fourteen years as pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Evans was appointed secretary of the UCC. In 1983, Evans retired from the UCC but remained an active pastor for another five years, serving as interim pastor at churches in Columbus, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Portland, Maine; Amherst, New Hampshire; and Norwell, Massachusetts.

Evans passed away on April 12, 2008 at the age of 92. He is survived by his wife, Harriette, and their three daughters, Lesley, Harriette, and Barbara.

Evans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 10, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Joseph Evans was conducted by Robert Hayden on August 10, 2005, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pastor Reverend Joseph Evans (1915 - 2008) is the first and only African American to hold the positions of both national secretary and president of a mainline church denomination in the United States, the United Church of Christ.

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:

Evans, Joseph H. B. (Joseph Henry B.), 1915-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Evans, Joseph H. B. (Joseph Henry B.), 1915---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United Church of Christ.

Occupations:

Pastor

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 Reverend Joseph Evans, August 10, 2005. 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 Reverend Joseph Evans, Section A2005_195_001_001, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

Reverend Joseph Evans was born on August 15, 1915 in Kalamazoo, Michigan to Etta Hill Evans and Charles Evans, Sr. His maternal grandmother, Flora Hill, was a former slave who moved from Virginia to Michigan where she met her husband, Forrest Hill, a contractor. Evans' mother, a public school teacher, graduated from Wilberforce University. Evans' father, a postal worker, moved from Washington, D.C. to Kalamazoo, Michigan. After living in Fort Wayne, Indiana for a few years, Evans grew up in Chicago with his brothers, twins Charles Evans, Jr. and Bruce Evans. Evans left his family's Christian Scientist faith to attend the Church of the Good Shepherd. He attended Yale Divinity School where he studied under Roland H. Bainton and Douglas Clyde Macintosh. While at Yale, he was a student assistant at Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church under Reverend Edward Goin. Although his responsibilities increased as Goin fell ill, a parishioner kept Evans from preaching because he was not ordained.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Evans, Section A2005_195_001_002, TRT: 0:30:17 ?

Reverend Joseph Evans' family attended Christian Scientist churches in Chicago, but he joined the Church of the Good Shepherd, pastored by Harold M. Kingsley. He graduated from Englewood High School and attended Lewis Institute for a year. He then worked at Walgreens drug store, where he advanced from delivery boy to clerk. He attended Western State Teachers College in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He graduated in 1939 and entered Yale Divinity School, where he studied under theologians Roland H. Bainton, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Liston Pope. He was class president his third year and witnessed three Japanese students taken into custody by the FBI after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Upon graduating in 1942, Evans pastored a church in Brooklyn, New York, but he struggled to understand its West Indian congregants, so he moved to Grace Congregational Church of Harlem. There, Evans met his wife, Harriette Clark Evans. Evans describes being hired by the Connecticut Council of Churches and two of his daughters.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Evans, Section A2005_195_001_003, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Reverend Joseph Evans served as associate general secretary of the Connecticut Council of Churches before being called to Mt. Zion Congregational Church in Cleveland in 1947. In 1950, his third daughter, Barbara Evans Edelin, was born. In 1953, he returned to the Church of the Good Shepherd in Chicago where he pastored for fourteen years. While there, he hired the church's first associate minister, Clyde Miller. His wife, Harriette Clark Evans, gave dance lessons to children at the parsonage. Evans was president of the Chicago Urban League for two terms. In 1967, the Black Caucus of the United Church of Christ and the Committee on Racial Justice, headed by Charles Earl Cobb, called for Evans to replace the organization's recently departed secretary at the Sixth General Synod. Evans was elected secretary and moved to New York. In 1976, the United Church of Christ's president, Robert Moss, died suddenly. Evans took his place for one year before returning to serve as secretary for sixteen years.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Evans, Section A2005_195_001_004, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

Reverend Joseph Evans served as president of the United Church of Christ for one year before resuming his earlier position as secretary. He was secretary for sixteen years before retiring in 1983. He then served as a conference minister for

the Ohio Conference of Congregational Christian Churches. From 1981 to 1987, Evans taught a course on preaching at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut. Although initially reluctant, he was persuaded to teach by Dean William McKinney, and Charles Shelby Rooks helped him create the curriculum. As an interim minister, Evans pastored at various churches, including ones in Amherst, New Hampshire and Portland, Maine. After fully retiring in 1989, he bought a home in Sarasota, Florida. Evans remembers studying at Yale Divinity School with Richard I. McKinney and attending the General Synod of the United Church of Christ. He reflects upon his ministry, his future plans, his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Evans, Section A2005_195_001_005, TRT: 0:08:52 ?

Reverend Joseph Evans describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.