

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Eddie Williams

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Williams, Eddie N.   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | April 24, 2003   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2003   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:45).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Nonprofit chief executive Eddie Williams (1932 - 2017 ) is president of the Joint Center, an independent Washington, D.C., think tank. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2003_088  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Without ever holding public office, Eddie N. Williams worked his way into becoming an influential part of United States' governmental affairs. Born in 1932, Williams was raised solely by his mother following the death of his father, who was a jazz and blues pianist on Memphis' Beale Street. After earning his journalism degree from the University of Illinois in 1956, Williams tried to get a job at the down state Illinois paper where he had worked part time in school, but was rejected when the paper's owner refused to hire African Americans.

Williams returned to his hometown of Memphis and took a job as managing editor of the *Star-Times*, a new black newspaper. Williams served briefly in the Army, and later worked as a reporter in Atlanta, before receiving a Congressional fellowship to work under Senator Hubert H. Humphrey in 1960. Williams utilized his Washington connections to gain a job as a Foreign Service reserve officer with the State Department, where he worked for seven years. In 1968, Williams took a job at the University of Chicago as director of the Center for Policy Study; five months later he became vice president for public affairs at the university.

In 1972, Williams left his job at the University of Chicago to become president of the Joint Center, then a young, small, operation in downtown Washington, D.C. Under Williams's leadership, the Joint Center earned a reputation as an outstanding policy think tank. The nonpartisan Joint Center examines public policy issues affecting African Americans, and is one of the few institutions to examine African Americans as a separate entity. Because of the way it operates, the Joint Center has developed a close partnership with the Congressional Black Caucus and retains formidable policy making clout.

For his work in shaping the legislative landscape on matters of policy concerning blacks, Williams received several awards and honorary degrees. The *National Journal* named Williams one of the 150 outsiders who have had the greatest impact on the federal government, and in 1988 Williams was named a recipient of a prized MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant. An active member of several professional and civic organizations, Williams served as vice chairman of the Black Leadership Forum. Williams and his wife, Jearline, raised three children.

Williams passed away on May 8, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Eddie Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 24, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive Eddie Williams (1932 - 2017 ) is president of the Joint Center, an independent Washington, D.C., think tank.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Williams, Eddie N.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Williams, Eddie N.--Interviews

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African American political consultants--Interviews

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African American politicians--Interviews

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African American families

African Americans--Genealogy

Faulkner, William

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865

African American fathers

African American mothers

Education

Memphis (Tenn.)

Crump, Edward Hull, 1874-1954

United States. Army--African American troops

Fort Bliss (Tex.)

Police brutality

African American young men

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Discrimination in education

Race discrimination--United States

Argonne National Laboratory

Guided missiles

Atlanta University

Cook, Samuel DuBois, 1927-

Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (U.S.)

Norton, Eleanor Holmes

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Million Man March (1995 : Washington, D.C.)

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Jordan, Vernon E. (Vernon Eulion), 1935-

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Gore, Albert, 1948-

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Bush, George, 1924-

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Clinton, Bill, 1946-

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Powell, Colin L.

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Clinton, Hillary Rodham

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (U.S.)

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## Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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## 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 Eddie Williams, April 24, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Eddie N. Williams starts by retracing his mother's side of the family and informs us that they were servants to William Faulkner's family shortly after the Civil War. Williams also goes into some detail about his father, who died early in Eddie's life, and shares some stories about him. Williams was primarily raised by his mother; she instilled in him the value of education, which eventually lead him to the University of Illinois. Also influential was an elementary school teacher who nurtured Williams's aspirations to become a journalist. Williams speaks of his childhood in Memphis numerous times as he recalls old friends and experiences. Looking back, he remembers the political situation African Americans were in at that point in time and tells of Memphis Mayor Edward Hull Crump.

African American political consultants--Interviews.

African American politicians--Interviews.

African American families.

African Americans--Genealogy.

Faulkner, William.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

African American fathers.

African American fathers.

Education.

Memphis (Tenn.).

Crump, Edward Hull, 1874-1954.

United States. Army--African American troops.

Fort Bliss (Tex.).

Police brutality.

African American young men.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Discrimination in education.

Race discrimination--United States.

Argonne National Laboratory.

Guided missiles.

Atlanta University.

Cook, Samuel DuBois, 1927-.

Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978.

Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (U.S.).

Norton, Eleanor Holmes.

Million Man March (1995 : Washington, D.C.).

Jordan, Vernon E. (Vernon Eulion), 1935-.

Gore, Albert, 1948-.

Bush, George, 1924-.

Clinton, Bill, 1946-.

Powell, Colin L.

Clinton, Hillary Rodham.

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Eddie N. Williams discusses the trials and tribulations he experienced while in the Army at Fort Bliss, Texas. Williams admits that he did not enjoy the position in Artillery and thinks that he was more qualified for work in Intelligence. We then get a glimpse into Williams's teenage years in Memphis, Tennessee, as he describes his first job and first car. One of the issues that Williams had to deal with while growing up in Memphis was police brutality; he recalled times of being harassed by police. In high school Williams was involved in numerous social and athletic activities. Williams's desire to be a journalist, and the aid of a mentor, kept him focused on his studies and on making steps to be accepted into a journalism school. Williams decided on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign due to its being a closer distance to Memphis compared to other schools to which he applied. Williams finds the Illinois winters brutal and encounters racism from some teachers. Despite his challenges, Williams makes important connections and learns valuable life lessons. The interview then swings back to his military experience where Williams is stationed at Argonne National Laboratory and is involved with the beginning technology of guided missiles.

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Eddie N. Williams excels in the United States military as he makes his way up the ranks. After becoming an officer he is accepted into flight school, but after a negative experience with a battalion commander he decides to pursue other career avenues. Williams is turned away by all of the Chicago area newspapers he applies to, but eventually finds work at the Atlanta Daily World newspaper as a reporter. Once in Atlanta, Williams enrolls in graduate school at Atlanta University where he meets professor Sam Dubois Cook; Cook convinces Williams to apply for a grant that would give him the opportunity to intern as a journalist on Capitol Hill. Williams is selected for the grant and relocates to Washington, D.C., where he ends up working under Hubert Humphrey and John F. Kennedy. He then speaks of the seven years he spent occupying various positions in the Department of State where he becomes involved with leaders from around the world. Williams is recruited out of the State Department by mentor Louis Martin and takes a position at the University of Chicago. In 1972 he is asked to take over the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Between 1969 and 1972 Eddie N. Williams was the vice president of public affairs at the University of Chicago. He describes this position as his "dream job." Williams's duties at the university were not limited in any way; the opportunity to change the university for the better was within his reach. However, Williams's colleague, Frank Reeves, who was in poor health, asks him to be the president of a newly established not-for-profit organization that ends up being named the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Going against University of Chicago president Edward Levi's advice, Williams leaves the university and accepts the position. Williams then explains how the Joint Center's mission has changed over the past thirty years as well as his hopes for the organization's future. He then discusses their database, which is accessed by various people involved in political and economic realms. Williams tells how the collected data and research is used as a tool in a number of forums including political elections, court cases and best practices in business. Williams then describes how the Joint Center is bettering the African American community in even more areas, such as health care.

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

Eddie N. Williams tells the history of the South African branch of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and its goals. He then speaks of politicians who have been experts in using the Joint Center's data. Among the politicians Williams touches upon are Harold Washington, Charlie Rangel, and John Conyers. Williams discusses his involvement with Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton in creating the D.C. Commission on Black Men and Boys that was started in response to the Million Man March. Williams also talks of his role with the Black Leadership Forum as vice chairman. Williams speaks of the frustration he feels by seeing African American leaders getting close to their goals but not fully reaching them. He also speaks of the complex social and political climates within which leaders of today must operate. The subject of school vouchers, an issue on which the Joint Center has done much research, is discussed next. Williams speaks on some of the pros and cons of the issue and admits that a solution will not be reached as easily as some have said. He then speaks of the positive relationship that the Joint Center has with the black press. Having been involved with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies for thirty-one years, he feels that his leadership and involvement with the organization will be his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Eddie Williams, Section A2003\_088\_001\_006, TRT: 0:13:10 ?

Eddie N. Williams states that he would like to be remembered as someone who made a significant and important contribution to society. Eddie N. Williams shows us a selection of photographs. Photos include Williams with Vernon Jordan, Louis Martin, Al Gore, George Bush, Bill Clinton, Hubert Humphrey, Colin Powell, Barbara Jordan, and Hillary Rodham Clinton.