

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

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Williams, Armstrong, 1959-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 29, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:55:35).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Media commentator Armstrong Williams (1959 - ) hosted The Right Side with Armstrong Williams on WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 29, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_170
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive Armstrong Williams was born on February 5, 1959, in Marion, South Carolina. Williams was raised with his nine siblings on a 200-acre tobacco farm in South Carolina. He received his B.S. degree in political science and economics from South Carolina State University in 1981 and was mentored by former Senator Strom Thurmond as a legislative aide. From 1982 to 1986, Williams worked as a confidential assistant to the chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Clarence Thomas, before moving into the field of public relations. He worked as a vice president for governmental and international affairs with B&C Associates before launching the Graham Williams Group in 1991.

Williams first made waves during the controversy surrounding the appointment of Thomas to the Supreme Court. His columns defending his former boss were reprinted in newspapers around the country, marking Williams' debut as a media personality. Since then, he has written weekly syndicated columns that have appeared in over 300 newspapers across the nation, including the *Washington Times* and *New York Amsterdam News*. In 1991, Williams got his first radio show, and by 1995 *The Right Side with Armstrong Williams* achieved national distribution. That same year he published a successful book, *Beyond Blame: How We Can Succeed By Breaking the Dependency Barrier*. Williams has also hosted a political talk show, *The Armstrong Williams Show*, which airs on Sirius XM 126 Urban View satellite radio.

From 2001 to 2003, Williams served as the chief operating officer of Renaissance TV Cable Network, where he managed staff, programming, advertising and developing prime-time specials. He also founded, and serves as manager of Howard Stirk Holdings, a company which owns two broadcast stations: WWMBCW21 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and WEYINBC25 in Flint, Michigan. In addition, Williams is Dr. Benjamin Carson's business manager; executive editor of *American CurrentSee Magazine*; and is a partner in Chateau EZ in the South of France, the Sonnet Hotel in Mallorca, Spain, and Casa De La Brisa in Mexico.

A lifelong member of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Williams has served on the boards of Childhelp USA, *The*

*Washington Afro-American Newspaper*, the Presidential Commission on White House Fellows, Independence Federal S&L Bank, the Ben & Candy Carson Scholarship Fund, and NEWSMAX. *Talkers Magazine* has named him one of the 100 most important radio talk show hosts in America.

Armstrong Williams was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 29, 2003.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Armstrong Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 29, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Media commentator Armstrong Williams (1959 - ) hosted *The Right Side with Armstrong Williams* on WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C.

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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, Armstrong, 1959-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Williams, Armstrong, 1959---Interviews

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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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## Occupations:

Media Commentator

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Armstrong Williams, July 29, 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 Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Armstrong Williams was born on February 5, 1959 in Marion, South Carolina.

His mother, Thelma Williams, was born on April 9, 1926 in Florence, South Carolina. Descendants of slaves, his mother's relatives were Pentecostal sharecroppers. His father, James Williams, was born on July 2, 1919 from a lineage of landowners. After convincing Guy Davis, a white man, to loan him \$800 for forty acres of land, Williams' great-grandfather repaid the loan within a year. Williams' parents dropped out of middle school. After becoming widowed with four young children, Williams' father asked Williams' maternal grandfather for an arranged marriage with his daughter, Thelma. The couple married in 1957 and had six children. His father built a large brick home as the family's affluence grew in the 1960s. In 1964, when three white men burned down the family barn. Williams' father did not press charges while providing him an important lesson to live by. He told Williams to judge people as individuals, not based on their race.

Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Armstrong Williams describes the smells of his childhood including redwood bushes, tobacco, lye soap, barbeque, manure, and watermelon. His mother and aunts earned the preacher's appreciation and favor with their good cooking and delicious pies. Growing up on a farm, Williams woke up early and labored by slopping hogs, cutting off testicles, killing roosters, and blowing up stumps. His father was a strict disciplinarian who whipped his children if they misbehaved. In 1976, Williams won a state oratory contest. At Rains Centenary High School, Williams was student body president, managed the basketball team, participated in 4H, and wrote sports articles for the school newspaper. Although Williams claims to not have experienced racism other than when his family's barn was burned, he recalls experiencing color bias as dark-skinned student when his light skinned advisor at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina advised him not to run for student body president because of his dark skin.

Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Armstrong Williams describes his enrollment in South Carolina State University's ROTC in Orangeburg, South Carolina without his father's knowledge. After spending \$1700 from the ROTC, Williams had second thoughts and so his father repaid the money so that Williams could get out of his ROTC contract. Williams' guilt motivated him to excel as a student. Williams was elected student body president as a Republican by sixty-five votes and was re-elected the next year by a landslide. He used the money he earned while in college to buy his mother nice clothing since his father refused to do so. He also talks about his father beating his brother for dating a white girl. Williams then tells the story of meeting Senator Strom Thurmond as a teenager and confronting him about being racist. He stayed in touch with Thurmond and became Thurmond's summer intern in Washington, D.C. In 1985, Thurmond corrected an insurance mistake for Williams' mother after his father's death and this made her feel better about white people.

Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Armstrong Williams talks about his work at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina on Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign. After graduating from college in 1981, Williams was hired to work at the Department of Agriculture. Williams recalls convincing his mentor, Senator Strom Thurmond, to attend a party at his small apartment and Thurmond made a hit

when he quoted Barry White's song "It's Time For A Change." Williams made headlines when he successfully recruited Richard Pryor to speak at a Black History Month reception in Washington, D.C in 1982. The next day, Williams was appointed to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by Clarence Thomas. Williams recalls Thurmond's support of Coretta Scott King's funding requests and the time when Mrs. King, Williams, and Thurmond walked together to President George H.W. Bush's inauguration. Williams describes how he believes that his friendship influenced Thurmond to shift his attitude on race. Williams shares his views on school vouchers.

Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

Armstrong Williams chronicles his professional career. Williams worked as a vice president for governmental and international affairs with B&C Associates before launching the Graham Williams Group with Stedman Graham in 1991. Williams' columns that defended the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court were reprinted in newspapers across the country, marking Williams' debut as a media personality. Since then, he has written weekly syndicated columns that have appeared in over 300 newspapers. In 1991, Williams had his first radio show; and by 1995, 'The Right Side with Armstrong Williams' achieved national distribution. In 1996, Armstrong became a contributor on Black Entertainment Television (BET), Black Forum, and National Empowerment Television (NET). Williams describes his conservative political philosophy and shares his views on the criminal justice system and the death penalty. Williams recalls Strom Thurmond's birthday party where Senator Trent Lott made a racist comment.

Video Oral History Interview with Armstrong Williams, Section A2003\_170\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Armstrong Williams describes his hopes and concerns and the value of individuality for the African American community. Williams also shares his views on racial profiling, hate crimes legislation, how he would like to be remembered as well as his legacy. He regrets not marrying and having children. Williams concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.