

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert B. Hill

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hill, Robert Bernard, 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill,
Dates:	August 24, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:38:23).
Abstract:	Sociologist Robert B. Hill (1938 -) is the author of <i>The Strength of Black Families</i> , and has held positions with the Bureau of Sociology and Science Research and as a consultant at the White House for the Reagan Administration. Hill also served as a research director at Morgan State University, and in 1999, Hill published, <i>The Strengths of African American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later</i> . Hill was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 24, 2004, in Rockville, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_140
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Robert Bernard Hill was born on September 7, 1938 in Brooklyn, New York. His mother worked as a domestic and his father was a cook. He attended New York City public schools. In 1956, Hill earned his high school diploma from Boys High School, where he was active in student government, the school paper, and the math and history clubs.

From 1956 until 1961, Hill attended City Colleges of New York, where he earned his B.A. degree in sociology. While attending City Colleges in 1960, he reactivated the campus Youth NAACP chapter and became its president. During his tenure, he befriended and invited civil rights activist Malcolm X to speak to students. Hill went on to earn his Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University in 1969.

Hill became a social researcher for the National Urban League in 1969, and continued to work in that capacity until 1981. In 1972, he published his first book, *The Strengths of Black Families* to counter negative stereotypes of blacks in the 1965 report on the Negro family by Daniel Moynihan. While working for the Urban League, Hill taught sociology course at Fordham, New York University, Princeton, the University of Maryland, Howard University, and the University of Pennsylvania. From 1981 and 1986, Hill worked for the Bureau of Social Science Research. From there, he worked as a consultant at the White House for the Reagan Administration where he researched and documented self-help groups around the country. From 1989 until 1998, Hill worked as a Research Director at Morgan State University. In 1999, Hill published his latest book, *The Strengths of African American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later*. During that same year, Hill was offered a position with Westat, a research firm in Rockville, Maryland, where he remains today.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert B. Hill was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 24, 2004, in Rockville, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sociologist Robert B. Hill (1938 -) is the author of *The Strength of Black Families*, and has held positions with the Bureau of Sociology and Science Research and as a consultant at the White House for the Reagan Administration. Hill also served as a research director at Morgan State University, and in 1999, Hill published, *The Strengths of African American Families: Twenty-Five Years Later*.

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:

Hill, Robert Bernard, 1938-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hill, Robert Bernard, 1938---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Sociology Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 B. Hill, August 24, 2004. 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 B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_001, TRT: 0:30:39 ?

Robert B. Hill was born on September 7, 1938 in New York, New York. A DNA test revealed that his ancestors originated from Sierra Leone and Nigeria. His mother, Marie Brown Hill, was born and raised in Florence, South Carolina and often visited family in the country. His maternal great-great-grandfather was born into slavery in 1820; he later owned land that he left to his two sons. Hill's maternal great-grandfather, a stern businessman, divided his inherited acres

between his twelve children, including Hill's maternal grandmother. Hill's mother was a domestic, worked at a sewing machine factory and emphasized upward mobility. His father, Curtis Hill, was born in St. George, South Carolina and worked as a cook at Lundy's Restaurant in New York City. Hill grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn surrounded by commercial businesses and near his aunt. He played skully and stickball and attended P.S. 42 for elementary school. He visited his paternal grandmother in Florence during summers.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_002, TRT: 0:30:39 ?

Robert B. Hill was a precocious student who read newspapers when he was five years old and was encouraged by his teachers at P.S. 42 in New York, New York. Hill grew up near an Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn and often saw Italian festivals and New York's hustle and bustle. He attended Antioch Baptist Church in Brooklyn, where he developed his educational aspirations. His minister and mentor, Reverend George Lawrence, knew HistoryMaker Wyatt Tee Walker and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and often invited them to speak at the church. Hill went to P.S. 9, a majority-white junior high school in Brooklyn where Jackie Robinson presented him with a trophy for winning a table tennis tournament. Hill was expected to apply to an elite New York high school. He attended Boys High School in Brooklyn where he edited the school newspaper, participated in student government and witnessed a steady influx of African American students. He remembers friends from his youth, including one who lost his life to drugs.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_003, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Robert B. Hill worked at a hardware store during his high school years in New York, New York. Although he applied to a number of colleges, he did not receive the requisite financial support. Thus, he decided to attend the day session at The City College of New York (CCNY) when there were relatively few African American students. He switched his major from engineering to sociology after being inspired by his mentor, sociology professor Lawrence Podell. At CCNY, he reinstated a NAACP youth chapter and invited Malcolm X as a guest speaker in 1960. In 1961, Hill entered the graduate program in sociology at Columbia University and worked as a research assistant in a sociological institute and for the Kerner Commission studying riots. Hill reflects upon the publication and effects of the 1965 Moynihan Report. In 1969, he completed his master's degree and joined the National Urban League's research department where he evaluated data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau on African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_004, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Robert B. Hill worked with Whitney Young to form the Coalition for a Black Count to address the U.S. Census Bureau's neglect of African Americans in their national and regional counts. His 1971 report, 'The Strengths of Black Families,' countered the Moynihan Report by offering five observable strengths in black families and was published as a book in 1972. Although he received criticism for romanticizing black families, his aim was to offer a comprehensive and balanced account. HistoryMaker Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. promoted Hill to director of research at the National Urban League, and he was supported in his work by colleague Ron Brown. Hill then continued his research on family issues at the Bureau of Social Science Research. During the Reagan administration, Hill was a White House research consultant alongside HistoryMaker Robert Woodson. In 1985 and 1986, he was an adjunct professor at multiple East Coast universities and in 1989 became research director at Morgan State University in Baltimore,

Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_005, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Robert B. Hill left Morgan State University in 1999 to work at Westat, a research firm based in Rockville, Maryland specializing in collecting data for government agencies in areas including mental health, clinical trials, welfare reform and criminal justice. That same year he published 'The Strengths of African American Families: 25 Years Later,' a sequel to his earlier report, which identified new challenges facing African American families including HIV/AIDS, crime and the drug trade. Hill's recent report also identified positive trends including an expansion of middle and upper class African Americans. He talks about the effects of the income gap for African American families, the impact of racism and the media's unbalanced portrayal of African Americans. He shares advice for African American parents, and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how would like to be remembered. He reflects upon his legacy as an activist researcher. He concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert B. Hill, Section A2004_140_001_006, TRT: 0:07:08 ?

Robert B. Hill narrates his photographs.