

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bishop Barbara Harris

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harris, Barbara C. (Barbara Clementine)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris,
Dates:	February 12, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:46:30).
Abstract:	Bishop Barbara Harris (1930 - 2020) was the first woman to be ordained to the episcopate in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 12, 2007, in Foxboro, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_062
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Bishop Barbara Clementine Harris was born on June 12, 1930 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Harris grew up in Germantown, a neighborhood of Philadelphia. Her mother, Beatrice Price Harris, played the organ for St. Baranabas Church and her father, Walter Harris, was a steel worker. While attending Philadelphia High School for Girls, where she excelled in music, Harris wrote a weekly column called *High School Notes by Bobbi* for the Philadelphia edition of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American newspaper. After graduating from high school in 1948, she attended the Charles Morris Price School of Advertising and Journalism. She earned a certificate from Charles Morris Price in 1950. In later years, Harris would study at Villanova University and the Episcopal Divinity School.

As a member of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (ESCRU) since the late 1950s, Harris served on a number of diocesan committees. In the 1960s, she helped to form the Union of Black Clergy and Laity which was subsequently called the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE). She was a member of the St. Dismas Fellowship and served on the board of the Pennsylvania Prison Society. During the summer of 1964, Harris volunteered with Delta Ministries in Greenville, Mississippi, educating and registering voters. In 1974, she advocated for the ordination of the "Philadelphia Eleven," a group of women who had been ordained priests, but were labeled "irregular" by the Anglican Communion. By 1976, the church began to admit women priests and, in October 1980, Harris was ordained as a priest. After her ordination, she served as priest at St. Augustine of Hippo Church and as chaplain of Philadelphia County Prison.

In 1984, Harris was appointed executive director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company, molding the social direction of the Episcopal Church. Known for her strong advocacy for social justice, Harris was elected in 1988 as the consecrated Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, becoming the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion. She served as bishop until 2002 when she retired at the age of seventy-two. Harris is the recipient of numerous honors including an honorary degree from Yale University's Divinity School and the 2007 Wisdom Award from the National Visionary Leadership Project. After suffering a stroke in 2010, Harris made a

full recovery and still advocates for social change.

Bishop Barbara Harris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 12, 2007.

Harris passed away on March 13, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bishop Barbara Harris was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 12, 2007, in Foxboro, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bishop Barbara Harris (1930 - 2020) was the first woman to be ordained to the episcopate in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

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:

Harris, Barbara C. (Barbara Clementine)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Harris, Barbara C. (Barbara Clementine)--Interviews

African American religious leaders--Interviews.

African American women bishops--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Episcopal Church.

Occupations:

Religious Leader

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 Bishop Barbara Harris, February 12, 2007. 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 Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris was born on June 12, 1930 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Beatrice Price Harris and Walter Harris. Her maternal great-grandmother was a slave on the Brawner plantation in Maryland, and once met Union general Ulysses S. Grant. Her maternal grandmother, Mary Price, was a midwife, and her maternal grandfather, Thomas Price, owned a seafood restaurant and an illicit gambling parlor. They raised five children in Philadelphia, including Harris' mother, a Germantown High School graduate who played the organ in church and for silent movies. Her paternal grandparents, Cornelius Harris and Josephine Harris, moved from Richmond, Virginia to Philadelphia, where her father worked at a shoe repair shop and a steel mill. He also worked at a factory where he was mistaken for white, until he stated he was African American, and was fired. Harris' parents met and married in Philadelphia, where she grew up in the neighborhood of Germantown, and attended St. Barnabas Episcopal Church with her two siblings.

African American families--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African American childre--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African Americans--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Gospel music.

Radio programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris aspired to be a musician from an early age, and sang in a junior choir in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She attended the segregated Thomas Meehan School, where she learned African American history from Ethel Lyman Eggleston, and read the works of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. In the fifth grade, she attended the Edwin H. Fitler School, where she was one of three black students. On one occasion, she retaliated against a boy's discriminatory comments, and lost her position on the school safety patrol. She went on to attend Elizabeth Duane Gillespie Junior High School, and later the elite Philadelphia High School for Girls, where black students were not allowed to hold student government offices. At sixteen years old, she wrote a column in the Pittsburgh Courier, High School Notes by Bobbi, for which she was paid three dollars per week and held a press pass to the Earl Theatre. Harris also recalls her childhood heroes, singer Marian Anderson and attorney Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander.

African American girls--Childhood and youth--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African Americans--Religion--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African American churches--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

African Americans--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia--Social life and customs.

African American newspapers--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_003, TRT: 0:29:08 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris graduated from the Philadelphia High School for Girls in

1948. Unable to afford college, she accepted a position as junior executive with the African American public relations firm Joseph V. Baker Associates in 1949 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1950, she attended the Charles Morris Price School of Advertising and Journalism, where she earned a certification for her position. At Joseph V. Baker Associates, she counseled corporations on their approach to the African American market, and produced informational publications sponsored by firms like Scott Paper Company. In August of 1964, Harris volunteered with the Delta Ministry in Greenville, Mississippi to promote African American voter registration, and led a boycott of distributors exploiting local black taverns. While there, she was followed and threatened by members of the local police, who had tapped the church's phone lines. Harris also remembers activist Fannie Lou Hamer, and her role in the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Civil rights movements--Mississippi--Greenville.

African American business enterprises--Public relations.

African American women--Education--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_004, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris accepted a public relations position at the Sun Oil Company, Inc. in 1968. Concurrently, she joined the Philadelphia chapter of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, which catalyzed her involvement with Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. She became active in the Union of Black Episcopalians, which nominated her to the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church; the Coalition on Human Needs; and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. In 1974, she planned a service in which eleven women were ordained as priests in Philadelphia. In 1976, Harris was called to the ministry; and, while still employed at Sun Oil Company, Inc., took courses for her ordination examinations at Villanova University and the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1980, she was ordained as a priest. In 1984, she became the executive director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company, and formed the Consultation, a coalition to advocate for progressive reforms in the church.

Episcopacy.

Women in the Anglican Communion.

Anglican Communion.

African Americans--Religion.

Episcopal Church.

Sun Oil Company.

African American clergy.

Women clergy.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_005, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris was one of six nominees for suffragan bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts in 1988. Her status as a woman proved contentious, even among members of the Union of Black Episcopalians, where a male member was considered for the position. On September 25th, 1988, she became the first woman ever elected bishop in the history of the Anglican Communion. After her election, she received hate mail and death threats from members of the church who objected to her gender, as well as her race. She earned the majority of votes from the standing committees of dioceses; and,

despite continued objections, was consecrated as a bishop in 1989 under the guard of the Boston Police Department. After her consecration, other bishops in the church refused to recognize her authority, and a priest whom she ordained was considered invalid and prevented from officiating a wedding. Harris also describes the African American bishops who preceded her, and the Episcopal church in South Africa.

Women in the Anglican Communion.

Episcopal Church--Bishops--Massachusetts.

Episcopacy.

Women bishops--Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop Barbara Harris, Section A2007_062_001_006, TRT: 0:17:35 ?

Bishop Barbara Harris participated in the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965, but was unable to finish it in its entirety. She describes the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement embodied by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and her personal religious philosophy, which focused on inclusivity. Harris also reflects upon her career and family; her hopes and concerns for the African American community; and life and legacy. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

African Americans--Education.

Women in the Episcopal Church.

Episcopal Church--Bishops.

Social justice--Religious aspects.

Christianity.

Philosophical theology.