

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Randall Pinkston

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Pinkston, Randall
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston,
Dates:	August 25, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:28:19).
Abstract:	Broadcast journalist Randall Pinkston (1950 -) is a three-time national Emmy Award winner, worked at WCBS-TV and CBS News for thirty-three years. Pinkston was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 25, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_145
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist Randall Pinkston was born on March 3, 1950 in Yazoo County, Mississippi. His mother's aunt, a retired domestic worker, and her husband, a construction worker, raised Pinkston as their son in Jackson, Mississippi. As a child, Pinkston was fascinated by radio broadcast news. After graduating from Lanier High School in 1968, Pinkston attended Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, where he joined the campus radio station, WESU-FM. Pinkston left Wesleyan University after the death of his grand-uncle and completed his undergraduate studies at Millsaps College, where he received his B.A. degree in history in 1973. While attending college, Pinkston worked part-time at WJDX-FM and AM, and, in 1971, was hired as Saturday night anchor and producer for WLBT-TV in Jackson.

In August of 1973, after attending the Michelle Clark Fellowship Program for Minority Journalists at Columbia University, Pinkston was promoted to WLBT's 6:00 PM newscast, the first African American to anchor the #1 newscast at Mississippi's #1 television station. In 1974, he accepted a position with Post-Newsweek Station WJXT-TV, a CBS affiliate in Jacksonville, Florida, as the urban affairs director and producer. In 1976, Pinkston transferred to Post-Newsweek's WFSB-TV in Hartford, Connecticut, where he held posts as anchor, reporter and producer of public affairs programs.

While working in Hartford, he earned his J.D. degree from the University of Connecticut School of Law in 1980. That same year, Pinkston was hired as a correspondent with WCBS-TV, where he worked until 1990 when he was appointed as a CBS News White House correspondent. Pinkston reported on stories of national and international significance from the Persian Gulf War to the nomination of Justice Clarence Thomas. In 1994, he moved to the CBS New York news bureau and served as a correspondent for *CBS Evening News* as well as a contributor, reporter and correspondent for other CBS news broadcasts, including *CBS Reports*, *CBS 48 Hours*, and *CBS Sunday Morning*. In 2013, Pinkston ended a thirty-three year career with CBS. His final report included an interview with Myrlie Evers Williams on Medgar Evers' efforts to open broadcasting to minorities.

After CBS, Pinkston worked as an adjunct professor at the City University of New York School of Journalism and The University of Mississippi Meek School of Journalism, and as a freelance journalist for Al Jazeera America.

Pinkston's work was first recognized by the Great New York Safety Council for his reporting on underage drunk driving and its influence in the shaping of New York state law on underage drinking and driving. He is the recipient of a national Emmy award and an Edward R. Murrow Award for his work on *CBS Reports*' "Legacy of Shame," and two other national Emmy awards for reporting on the death of Princess Diana and the TWA Flight 800 disaster. He has also received a Community Service Award from the Society of Professional Journalists for a report on the aids crisis among African Americans.

Pinkston lives with his wife, Patricia McLain, in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Randall Pinkston was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 16, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Randall Pinkston was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 25, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist Randall Pinkston (1950 -) is a three-time national Emmy Award winner, worked at WCBS-TV and CBS News for thirty-three years.

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:

Pinkston, Randall

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Pinkston, Randall--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Journalist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Randall Pinkston, August 25, 2014. 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 Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_001, TRT: 1:36:49 ?

Randall Pinkston was born on March 3, 1950 in Yazoo County, Mississippi. His biological mother, Clementine Davis, was a teacher who placed Pinkston in the custody of his grandaunt and granduncle, Lucy and Warren Wallace, in Jackson, Mississippi at six months old. Lucy Wallace, was born in 1896 in Yazoo County. Pinkston's maternal great-grandmother, Annie Brown Pinkston, was born in 1878 in Copiah County, Mississippi. He talks about his earliest childhood memories and growing up poor in Jackson. He relocated briefly to Holly Bluff, Mississippi to live with his biological mother, when his grandaunt fell ill. Pinkston describes waking to the sound of the news on the radio and listening to Russ Ward and Morgan Beatty. He also talks about the origin of his interest in broadcasting, and the George Washington Carver Branch Library in Jackson, the only library in town accessible to African Americans. He recalls family meals, learning from his elders, and his grandaunt's medicinal garden and homeopathic remedies.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_002, TRT: 2:33:37 ?

Randall Pinkston learned to read from his grandaunt, Lucy Wallace, who raised him. After Wallace fell ill, Pinkston was sent to live with his mother, Clementine Davis, and great-grandmother in Yazoo County, Mississippi. His great-grandmother was a self-taught midwife and medicine woman; Pinkston remembers a story of her curing an earache for his mother. He began first grade at Hall Elementary School in Yazoo County before returning to Jackson, Mississippi where he attended Smith Robertson School and was baptized at Mount Helm Baptist Church. Pinkston describes his early love of reading, his relationship with his Sunday school teacher and his memory of Emmett Till's death in 1955. In Jackson, Pinkston attended Rowan Middle School and William H. Lanier High School. He recounts racially charged confrontations at the zoo and on his paper route. In high school, Pinkston participated in enrichment programs at Tougaloo College and Jackson State University. He also participated in the 1966 March Against Fear.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_003, TRT: 3:33:28 ?

Randall Pinkston describes his college application process and his decision to enroll at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut in 1968. After the death of his granduncle in 1969, he transferred to Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. As he finished his degree, Pinkston worked at radio station WJDX-FM and TV station WLBT-TV. At WLBT-TV, he initially anchored the Saturday news before anchoring the six o'clock and ten o'clock nightly news. Pinkston describes WLBT-TV general manager William Dilday, the first black general manager of a network affiliate television station. He also talks about avoiding the Vietnam War, Medgar Evers' support of equal air time for minorities on WLBT-TV, and the 1966 legal case, United Church of Christ v. Federal Communications Commission. After graduating from Millsaps College in 1973, he was admitted to the Michele Clark Fellowship Program for Minority Journalists. In 1974, he accepted a position with WJXT-TV, a Post-Newsweek Station in Jacksonville, Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_004, TRT: 4:35:16 ?

Randall Pinkston describes the negative impact of the 1966 Telecommunications

Reform Act. From 1971 to 1974, Pinkston worked as an anchor at WLBT-TV from 1971 to 1974. In 1974, he turned down a job offer in Nashville, Tennessee, choosing instead to work for WJXT-TV, a Post-Newsweek Station in Jacksonville, Florida. He describes his relationship with Jim Snyder, former vice president of news at Post-Newsweek; receiving advice from Max Robinson, the first black network news anchor; and the charter meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Pinkston describes the news team on Channel 9 in Washington D.C., where Robinson was an anchor, as well as its sale from Post-Newsweek in the 1970s. In 1976, Pinkston was admitted to the University of Connecticut School of Law in Hartford, Connecticut and joined WSFB-TV in Hartford. While in Connecticut, he bought a 3 percent interest in a new station, Channel 61. In 1980, Pinkston was offered a job as a correspondent for CBS Channel 2 in New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_005, TRT: 5:35:39 ?

Randall Pinkston turned down a promotion to anchor the six o'clock news while working at WSFB-TV in Hartford, Connecticut. In Hartford, he met journalist Adrienne Baughns-Wallace and eventually purchased a home from her in Queens, New York. Pinkston lists journalists of color at broadcast networks in 1980 and talks briefly about his college advisor, Daulton Lewis. In 1980, Pinkston started working at WCBS-TV in New York City. He remembers interviewing former New York mayor Edward Irving "Ed" Koch and covering the death of Michael Stewart, a young African American artist who died in police custody in 1983. As the New Jersey correspondent for WCBS-TV, Pinkston covered the launch of HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, and reported on Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign all the way through the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1990, he became a White House correspondent for CBS Network News, where he covered the beginning of the Gulf War in January 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_006, TRT: 6:28:56 ?

Randall Pinkston worked as the number two CBS News White House correspondent from 1990 to 1994. Pinkston describes traveling in the White House press pool on Air Force One with President George H.W. Bush. In January of 1992, Pinkston interviewed former President Bush on a visit to Japan, and was one of the first journalists to report when the president fell ill and collapsed at a banquet hosted by the Japanese Prime Minister, Kiichi Miyazawa. Pinkston critiques the Bush administration's handling of the Clarence Thomas hearings in 1991. After President Bush left office in 1994, Pinkston was reassigned as a general reporter. His assignments as a general reporter included 'CBS Sunday Morning' reporting, CBS '48 Hours,' and celebrity profiles. In 1995, Pinkston and Dan Rather reported, 'CBS Reports: Legacy of Shame,' a follow up to the 1960 'Harvest of Shame' television documentary that examined poverty and the brutal working conditions of migrant workers.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_007, TRT: 7:30:38 ?

Randall Pinkston interviewed HistoryMaker James Cameron, founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum, about having survived a lynching attempt for, 'CBS Sunday Morning.' He describes his coverage of the Unabomber bombings, a series of murders that occurred between 1978 and 1995 by mathematician Ted Kaczynski. Pinkston also describes how the iconic photograph of the Unabomber in custody was captured by him and his team. He talks about his coverage of the September 11th United States terrorist attacks in 2001 as a CBS network New York City correspondent. Pinkston talks about foreign assignments, including his coverage of the search for Osama bin Laden

in Afghanistan and visiting the caves in Tora Bora where bin Laden was suspected to have been hiding. Pinkston describes his living accommodations on assignment in Afghanistan and remembers the execution of four western journalists in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Video Oral History Interview with Randall Pinkston, Section A2014_145_001_008, TRT: 8:33:56 ?

Randall Pinkston describes potential danger he faced on assignment in the Middle East. His last foreign assignment was covering Saddam Hussein's execution in Iraq in December of 2006. A change in management at CBS led to Pinkston's demotion from the network to Newspath, CBS News' satellite news-gathering service, and his eventual departure from CBS in 2013. Pinkston talks about layoffs, internal issues within broadcast networks, and collaboration between media partners. He also talks about inaccurate and irresponsible reporting in regards to Shia-Sunni relations. Pinkston remembers lucky moments in his career as well as the deaths and injuries of CBS news correspondents in the early 2000s. Pinkston considers writing a book, reflects upon his legacy and talks about the condition of the African American community in contemporary America. He lists significant teachers and administrators throughout his life, including the first black person he had met with a home library.