

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vanessa Williams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Williams, Vanessa, 1963-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams,
Dates:	April 30, 2018
Bulk Dates:	2018
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:35:03).
Abstract:	Actress and singer Vanessa Williams (1963 -) was crowned Miss America 1984 but had to step down. She went on to release eight studio albums, and appear in countless films and television shows and sustain a significant entertainment career. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 30, 2018, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2018_076
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress and singer Vanessa Williams was born on March 18, 1963 to Milton and Helen Williams in Tarrytown, New York. Williams graduated from Horace Greeley High School in Millwood, New York in 1981, and enrolled at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York.

In 1983, Williams won the Miss Greater Syracuse Pageant and Miss New York Pageant. Later that fall, she was crowned Miss America 1984, becoming the first African American contestant to win the pageant. A scandal involving Williams forced her to resign in July of 1984. Williams then pursued a career in music. In 1988, she released her first album, *The Right Stuff*, which featured the singles *The Right Stuff*, *He's Got the Look* and *Dreamin'*. The album's popularity garnered Williams the NAACP Outstanding New Artist Award. Her multi-platinum second album, *The Comfort Zone*, was nominated for three Grammys in 1992, and her third album, *The Sweetest Days*, achieved platinum status in 1994. Williams earned another Grammy nomination for her popular rendition of *Colors of the Wind*, featured on the *Pocahontas* soundtrack. Williams went on to release five more studio albums: *Star Bright* (1996), *Next* (1997), *Silver & Gold* (2004), *Everlasting Love* (2005), and *The Real Thing* (2009), which debuted at #1 on the Billboard Jazz Charts.

Williams has also enjoyed a successful acting career. After making her acting debut on an episode of *The Love Boat* in 1984, Williams went on to appear in such films as *Eraser* (1996), *Soul Food* (1997), *Light It Up* (1999), *Shaft* (2000), opposite Samuel L. Jackson, *Johnson Family Vacation* (2004), *Hannah Montana: The Movie* (2009), and Tyler Perry's *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor* (2013). She also portrayed Suzanne de Passe in the Jackson 5 biopic *The Jacksons: An American Dream* (1992). Williams executive-produced and starred in Lifetime's *The Courage to Love* and VH1's original movie *A Diva's Christmas Carol*, both released in 2000.

Williams earned three-Emmy nominations for her starring role as Wilhelmina Slater on *Ugly Betty* from 2006 to 2010 and also starred on the last two seasons of *Desperate Housewives* on ABC, winning two NAACP Image

Awards for her portrayal of Renee Perry. She also starred as Maxine Robinson on the television show *Daytime Divas* in 2017.

In addition to acting on film and in television, Williams starred on Broadway in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1994), *Into the Woods* (2002; Tony Award nominee as Best Actress in a Musical), *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010) and *The Trip to Bountiful* (2003).

Williams, and her mother Helen Williams, co-authored the *New York Times* bestseller *You Have No Idea: A Famous Daughter, Her No-nonsense Mother, and How They Survived Pageants, Hollywood, Love, Loss (and Each Other)*, published in 2013. Williams returned to the Miss America Pageant in 2015 as the head judge and special performer – receiving an apology from the organization for the events that took place in 1984.

Williams has four adult children: Melanie, Jillian, Devin and Sasha.

Vanessa Williams was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 30, 2018.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vanessa Williams was conducted by Harriette Cole on April 30, 2018, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Actress and singer Vanessa Williams (1963 -) was crowned Miss America 1984 but had to step down. She went on to release eight studio albums, and appear in countless films and television shows and sustain a significant entertainment career.

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:

Williams, Vanessa, 1963-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Williams, Vanessa, 1963- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Film Actress

Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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 Vanessa Williams, April 30, 2018. 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 Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_001, TRT: 1:28:28 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_002, TRT: 2:30:02 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_003, TRT: 3:28:45 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_004, TRT: 4:28:47 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_005, TRT: 5:27:29 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_006, TRT: 6:29:08 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_007, TRT: 7:29:57 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Vanessa Williams, Section A2018_076_001_008, TRT: 8:12:27 ?