

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Father George Clements

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Clements, George, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements,
Dates:	April 23, 2003 and March 13, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:27:30).
Abstract:	Social activist and priest Father George Clements (1932 - 2019) adopted black children as Rector of the Holy Angels Church and School in Chicago, Illinois. Clements was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2003 and March 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_043
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The fourth of six children, Father George Clements was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 26, 1932. After attending Catholic elementary and high schools, Clements went on to St. Mary of the Lake Seminary School, first earning a B.A. degree and then an M.A. degree in 1957.

Clements began his ministry in 1957 in the archdiocese of Chicago. He aligned himself with various social causes, especially the Civil Rights Movement. In 1968, while Chicago's African American Catholics were calling for a black pastor, Clements was in the front running for the position. When the position of pastor was given to Father Rollins Lambert, many in the community were angry, including the Black Panthers, who Clements had served as group chaplain. When parishioners of St. Dorothy's, Lambert's former parish, began demanding Clements be appointed pastor, Cardinal John Cody instead placed him under Lambert. Following this, Clements went on a speaking tour at black colleges across the nation. In 1969, he was named pastor of Holy Angels Church, and while there, he harbored many Black Panthers wanted by the police.

Clements is the founder of the One Church-One Child, One Church-One Addict and One Church-One Inmate initiatives. In 1981, he became the first priest to adopt a child, and later adopted three more. His One Church-One Child program subsequently resulted in the adoption of more than 100,000 children nationwide. He has worked to help students from Africa secure higher education in the United States and has been active in the war on drugs. During the Million Man March in 1995, Clements announced plans for the One Church-One Addict program, wherein communities would provide aftercare for individuals who have been incarcerated. More than 1,000 churches in thirty-five states now belong to the program.

Clements was honored by numerous organizations, including the Kentucky State Senate, which issued a resolution praising his deeds. A film starring Lou Gossett, Jr., *The Father Clements Story*, was produced and broadcast by NBC in 1987.

Clements passed away on November 25, 2019.

Father George Clements was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 13, 2003 and April 23, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Father George Clements was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 23, 2003 and March 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Social activist and priest Father George Clements (1932 - 2019) adopted black children as Rector of the Holy Angels Church and School in Chicago, Illinois.

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:

Clements, George, 1932-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Clements, George, 1932---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

One Church, One Child (Organization)

Occupations:

Priest

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 Father George Clements, April 23, 2003 and March 13, 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).

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 Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_001_001, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements begins by detailing the backgrounds and lives of his mother and father and passing down stories from his heritage. Clements describes his childhood in Chicago, discussing family life and his religious upbringing as a Catholic.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_001_002, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements continues to recall his childhood in Chicago, describing his neighborhood and discussing his family's values. Clements discusses his early desires to become a priest and recounts his years in Quigley Seminary. Clements recalls difficulties faced as the only black in a class of five hundred, which ranged from a general lack of support to outright racist hostility from priests.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_001_003, TRT: 0:31:25 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements continues to describe his experience at Quigley Seminary, explaining how his experience there shaped his early thoughts on integration and race relations. He then describes his time at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, and explains the difference between religious order and diocesan priests. Clements recalls his ordination, his first church, and his early priesthood at St. Ambrose Church in Chicago. Clements also discusses his increasing civil rights activism after switching to St. Dorothy Church during the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_001_004, TRT: 0:31:25 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements discusses his rise to pastor of Holy Angels Church. Clements recalls making strategic alliances with the Black Panthers, the Blackstone Rangers and his parishioners to assure Holy Angels' continued existence. Clements discusses his activism 1960s when he assisted and spoke for controversial figures like Bobby Seale, Fred Hampton, and Jeff Fort. He also details his groundbreaking adoption of four boys, which spurred several initiatives, including One Child, One Church, One Church, One Addict and One Church, One Inmate.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_002_005, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements discusses his various battles with the church hierarchy, particularly Cardinal Cody. Clement discusses how he supported embattled black police officer Renault Robinson and the Afro-American Patrolman's League against racist police officers and commanders. Clements also opines on the dichotomy between Catholicism and the American Catholic Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_002_006, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Catholic priest and activist George Clements comments on controversial issues in Catholicism, including race, proselytizing, and the sexual abuse scandals of recent years. Clements reflects on his adoption of four children, explaining how being a parent changed his outlook on life. He explains how his parenthood led to the development of the One Church, One Family initiative. Clements also talks about rebuilding his Holy Angels Church in Chicago after a devastating fire.

Video Oral History Interview with Father George Clements, Section A2003_043_002_007, TRT: 0:24:20 ?

Catholic priest and activist Father George Clements continues to recount his activism through initiatives such as One Church, One Family. Clements discusses his long friendships with Louis Farrakhan, Dick Gregory and his regular efforts to reach out to people of different faiths. He also shares a story of his adopted son's difficulty in bonding with maternal figures after being abandoned by his mother in a courtroom. In closing, Clements says he wants to be remembered as a black man who was true to his race.