

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorothy B. Gilliam

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gilliam, Dorothy Butler, 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam,
Dates:	November 13, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:58:12).
Abstract:	Newspaper columnist Dorothy B. Gilliam (1936 -) wrote for the Washington Post for thirty years, and is a former president of the National Association of Black Journalists. Gilliam was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_266
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former president of the National Association of Black Journalists Dorothy Gilliam was born November 24, 1936, in Memphis, Tennessee. Her parents, Adele and Jessie Mae Butler had ten children, only five of whom survived. Gilliam began attending Ursuline University in Louisville and transferred to Lincoln University to study journalism.

While attending Ursuline University, Gilliam began working as a typist for the *Louisville Defender*, but at the age of seventeen, she was named the society editor. In 1957, while working for the *Tri-State Defender*, Gilliam, against the wishes of her boss, covered the integration of Little Rock. While there, she met an editor from *Jet* magazine and was offered a job as an associate editor. In 1959, after two years with *Jet*, Gilliam left to continue her education at Tuskegee Institute, and in 1960, she was accepted at Columbia University in the graduate school of journalism. Following graduation, Gilliam decided to travel to Africa with Crossroads, and upon her return in 1961, she was offered a job with *The Washington Post*. Leaving in the mid-1960s to spend time with her family, she returned to the *Post* in 1972, where she worked for more than thirty years and her popular Metro section columns often focused on issues of education, politics and race. In 1997 Gilliam became director of the Young Journalists Development Project, which helps local high schools develop journalism programs. Today, she is a fellow at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs.

Gilliam served as the president of the National Association of Black Journalists from 1993 to 1995. She is also a former fellow of the Freedom Forum at the Media Studies Center at Columbia University and the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. She has also authored the 1976 biography *Paul Robeson, All American*.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist Dorothy B. Gilliam (1936 -) wrote for the Washington Post for thirty years, and is a former president of the National Association of Black Journalists.

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:

Gilliam, Dorothy Butler, 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gilliam, Dorothy Butler, 1936- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington Post Company

Occupations:

Newspaper Columnist

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 Dorothy B. Gilliam, November 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 Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam was born on November 24, 1936 in Memphis, Tennessee. Her maternal grandparents owned a large farm in Lucy, Tennessee but lost much of their wealth during the Great Depression. Gilliam's mother, Jessie Norment Butler, went to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee to study education. She then taught in rural Tennessee where she met Gilliam's father, Adeo Butler. Butler

grew up on a farm in Woodstock, Tennessee and attended Rust College and Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute before graduating from Wilberforce University. Trained as a teacher, he later became a minister. Gilliam's family moved from Memphis to Louisville, Kentucky when she was five years old. In Louisville, they lived in the working class neighborhood of California in the parsonage of Youngs Chapel A.M.E. Church, which her father pastored and built. Gilliam's mother worked as a domestic to help support the family. Gilliam has five siblings who survived childhood, and she was a vocal youth leader in her church community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam attended Wheatley Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky's California neighborhood, a segregated African American community. She developed an aptitude for reading and speaking at a young age and skipped a grade in elementary school. After Gilliam's father became very ill, the family moved to a farm in Shelbyville, Kentucky. Her father passed away when Gilliam was fourteen years old. She recalls coping with his death by binging on food. The family continued to work on the farm to compensate for the loss of her father's income. Gilliam attended Madison Junior High School and Lincoln Institute, an all-black boarding school, during this time. She worked in the office for Whitney Young, Sr., Lincoln's principal, and participated in the oratorical club. After graduating from Lincoln Institute in 1953, she attended the all-women's Ursuline College in Louisville. Gilliam was one of eight student to integrate the school. Gilliam shares a family story about female gatherings in Memphis, Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam wrote for the Louisville Defender as society editor, while attending Ursuline College from 1953 to 1955. She then transferred to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri where she edited the Lincoln Clarion; was active in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; and studied under Dr. Armistead S. Pride, dean of the journalism school, and Dr. Lorenzo Greene. Gilliam graduated in 1957 and was hired by the Tri-State Defender in Memphis, Tennessee, where she worked with Editor L. Alex Wilson. While covering the 1957 integration of Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas, she met reporters from Jet. She was hired as an associate editor for the magazine in October 1957. At Jet, she became friends with Tom Mboya and HistoryMaker Samuel Yette. Gilliam left Jet in 1959 to attend Tuskegee Institute for a year before attending, the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. After graduating in 1961, she traveled to Kenya through Operation Crossroads Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam wrote stories for the Washington Post when she traveled to Kenya with Operation Crossroads Africa in 1961, and was hired as a reporter for the Post's city desk, covering Washington, D.C. politics, when she returned to the U.S. in the fall of 1961. In 1962, Gilliam covered the integration of the University of Mississippi in Oxford on assignment for The Post with the help of photographer HistoryMaker Ernest Withers. Gilliam attended the 1963 March on Washington with her husband, HistoryMaker Sam Gilliam, while she was on maternity leave. Gilliam left the Post in 1965 after the birth of her second daughter but returned as an editor seven years later. In the interim, she wrote for Redbook and appeared on the WTTG-TV show, Panorama. Gilliam explains

how the findings of the Kerner Commission and the urban riots in the late-1960s led to an increase in African American reporters at mainstream media outlets. She also talks about the role of the black press during the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_005, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam returned to the Washington Post in 1972 as associate editor of the paper's style section. After writing Paul Robeson's obituary, Gilliam developed her research into a book, 'Paul Robeson, All-American,' which was published in 1976. In the late-1970s, she began writing her metro section column for the Post, which focused on issues of race. It was eventually syndicated by the Post and the Philadelphia Daily News. From 1993 to 1995, Gilliam served as president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). She helped organize the first UNITY conference with other minority journalism associations. Gilliam founded the Washington Post's Young Journalists Development Project in 1997. After retiring in 2003, she continued developing programs to increase youth interest in media careers through her associations with The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education and George Washington University. Gilliam describes her concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy B. Gilliam, Section A2003_266_001_006, TRT: 0:28:26 ?

Dorothy B. Gilliam has worked to increase youth interest in media careers since founding the Young Journalists Development Project at the Washington Post in 1997. Through a \$175,000 grant, Gilliam was able to write a handbook on fostering partnerships between local media and high schools. She hopes that the American mainstream media will cover a greater diversity of topics in the future. Gilliam reflects upon her legacy, considers what she would have done differently in her life, and describes how she would like to be remembered. She concludes by narrating her photographs.