

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wimore, Gayraud S.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore,
Dates:	June 21, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:56:31).
Abstract:	Pastor and theologian Reverend Gayraud Wilmore (1921 - 2020) was the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Westchester, Pennsylvania, and has served as a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Interdenominational Theological Seminary, and worked as the executive director of the United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race. Wilmore was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 21, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_088
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Writer, historian, educator and theologian Gayraud Stephen Wilmore was born on December 20, 1921 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His mother was a domestic worker and his father, a World War I veteran, was an office clerk. His parents were active in the community where he grew up, and his father founded the first Black American Legion Post in Pennsylvania. He attended Central High School later renamed Benjamin Franklin where he was active in the drama club and wrote for the student newspaper. In 1937 Wilmore, just a junior in high school won a citywide contest for an essay he had written on Benjamin Franklin. He was also a member of the Young Communist League; he left the organization several years later after he discovered “he would not be allowed to think for himself.” He received his high school diploma in 1938. After high school, his studies at Lincoln University were interrupted when he was drafted into the army.

As a “Buffalo Soldier,” he served with the all black 92nd Infantry division in Italy. In 1943, he received his call to the ministry while dodging bullets in a foxhole during the war. He received his bachelor’s of arts degree in 1947 and his bachelor’s of divinity in 1950 from Lincoln University. He was also installed as the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Westchester, Pennsylvania in 1950, and would serve that congregation for three years. In 1951, Wilmore helped integrate Westchester elementary schools; his son was the first black student to attend an all white school. In 1953, he began his work with students as an associate executive with the United Presbyterian Church’s Department of Social Education and Action, a position he held for five years. From 1959 to 1963, Wilmore was an assistant professor of social ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. From there, he served as the executive director of the United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race until 1972. In that position, he helped to organize and train ministers who participated in boycotts and protests in the South during the Civil Rights movement. From 1972-1974, he taught Social Ethics at Boston University School of Theology, and then taught Black church studies at Colgate Rochester Divinity School until 1983. Wilmore served as the dean of the

divinity program at New York Theological Seminary until 1987 before becoming a teacher of church history at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. In 1990, he became the editor of *The Journal of the ITC*, and he remained in that post for five years. From 1995-1998, Wilmore was an adjunct professor at the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Wilmore has written and edited sixteen books including *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, which was published in 1998, and *Pragmatic Spirituality*, which was published in June of 2004. He is also the recipient of innumerable awards and honors.

Wilmore was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 21, 2004.

Wilmore passed away on April 18, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on June 21, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pastor and theologian Reverend Gayraud Wilmore (1921 - 2020) was the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Westchester, Pennsylvania, and has served as a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Interdenominational Theological Seminary, and worked as the executive director of the United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race.

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:

Wimore, Gayraud S.

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Wimore, Gayraud S.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Presbyterian Church

Occupations:

Pastor

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 Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, June 21, 2004. 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 Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, Section A2004_088_001_001, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Reverend Gayraud Wilmore was born on December 20, 1921 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His mother, Patricia Gardner Wilmore, was raised in Gloucester County, Pennsylvania on a plantation owned by northern whites. During WWI she moved to Philadelphia to work for a white family where she met Wilmore's father. She was hardworking and quiet, and attended McDowell Presbyterian church. Wilmore's father, Gayraud S. Wilmore, Sr. was born in Philadelphia, although his family was originally from Hartford County, Maryland. He founded the first African American Legion Post, led Boy Scout troops in Philadelphia and was a Garveyite who dreamt of becoming a journalist. Wilmore remembers white immigrants moving into his North Philadelphia neighborhood, but quickly moving out as they assimilated. He often visited the library and was a good student at Elisha Kent Kane School where black students increasingly outnumbered white students. As a child, Wilmore lived next door to Blanche Calloway; jazz reminds him of his childhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, Section A2004_088_001_002, TRT: 0:30:49 ?

Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, the oldest of three sons, attended Benjamin Franklin High School, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he wrote for the school newspaper, founded a drama club, joined the Young Communists League and was awarded a membership to the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia for winning an essay contest. Influenced by his father's dream of publishing a newspaper, Wilmore aspired to be a writer. He also considered becoming a deckhand. He graduated from high school in 1938 and earned a scholarship to Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 1942, he was drafted by the U.S. Army and served in the 371st Infantry. He committed himself to the ministry while on the front lines. He completed his education at Lincoln, earning his B.A. degree in 1947 and his B.Div. degree in 1950. The same year, he was installed as pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania. In 1952, his son integrated High Street School. In 1953, Wilmore received his M.Div. from Temple University.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, Section A2004_088_001_003, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Reverend Gayraud Wilmore received his call to ministry while serving in combat during WWII. In 1953, he worked with white college students through the mid-Atlantic student Christian movement. In 1959, he began teaching at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary while pursuing his Ph.D. degree, but left in 1963 to join the Civil Rights Movement by leading a national program in race relations for the Presbyterian church, based in New York City. Through the program, he brought northern ministers to Mississippi to engage in civil rights work. He was forced to resign when the Presbyterian laity objected to the use of funds to support the defense of HistoryMaker Angela Davis. In 1972, he joined

the faculty of Boston University School of Theology. He also taught at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and New York Theological Seminary, before accepting a position at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta in 1987. Wilmore describes his students, his books and a childhood experience with white neighbors.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, Section A2004_088_001_004, TRT: 0:23:49 ?

Reverend Gayraud Wilmore explains the impact of the Black Power movement on education about African American history and black theologians. While he was teaching at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, students rebelled against the faculty and administration for failing to teach African American history or theology. While Wilmore was directing the Presbyterian Church's commission on race relations, he helped organize the National Committee of Black Churchmen. The group published a statement on the theological meaning of Black Power. In 1970, he helped organize The Society for the Study of Black Religion. Wilmore talks about the importance of white ministries acknowledging the contributions of the black church, his ministerial goals, his chosen career and his late father's support for his writing. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered; and, reflects upon his ministry to his students and his legacy. He concludes by narrating his photographs.