

A Career of HONESTY, INTEGRITY and PERSEVERANCE

BILL WHITAKER OF CBS NEWS AND '60 MINUTES' RECEIVES THE QUINN AWARD FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

BY ALEX BEN
BLOCK

In 1987, Bill Whitaker was sent on assignment 30 miles from the Atlanta bureau of CBS News. His destination was all-white Forsyth County, Georgia, where about 1,500 Black and white protesters marched because the local government kept African Americans from moving there. They were confronted by angry counter-protesters, including hooded Ku Klux Klan members, many shouting the N-word and throwing rocks as police struggled to keep them apart.

Whitaker knew that at an earlier march, protesters had been badly beaten.

"The next week, there was a huge rally of people marching, saying, 'You cannot be this racist in the late 20th century,'" recalls Whitaker, then 36 and in his third year as a CBS network correspondent. "And there was a point where I got separated from everybody.

"I ended up in the crowd of racists," recalls Whitaker, "people who were calling me out, threatening me."

Whitaker was "jostled a bit," though not harmed. Still, he never forgot that day.

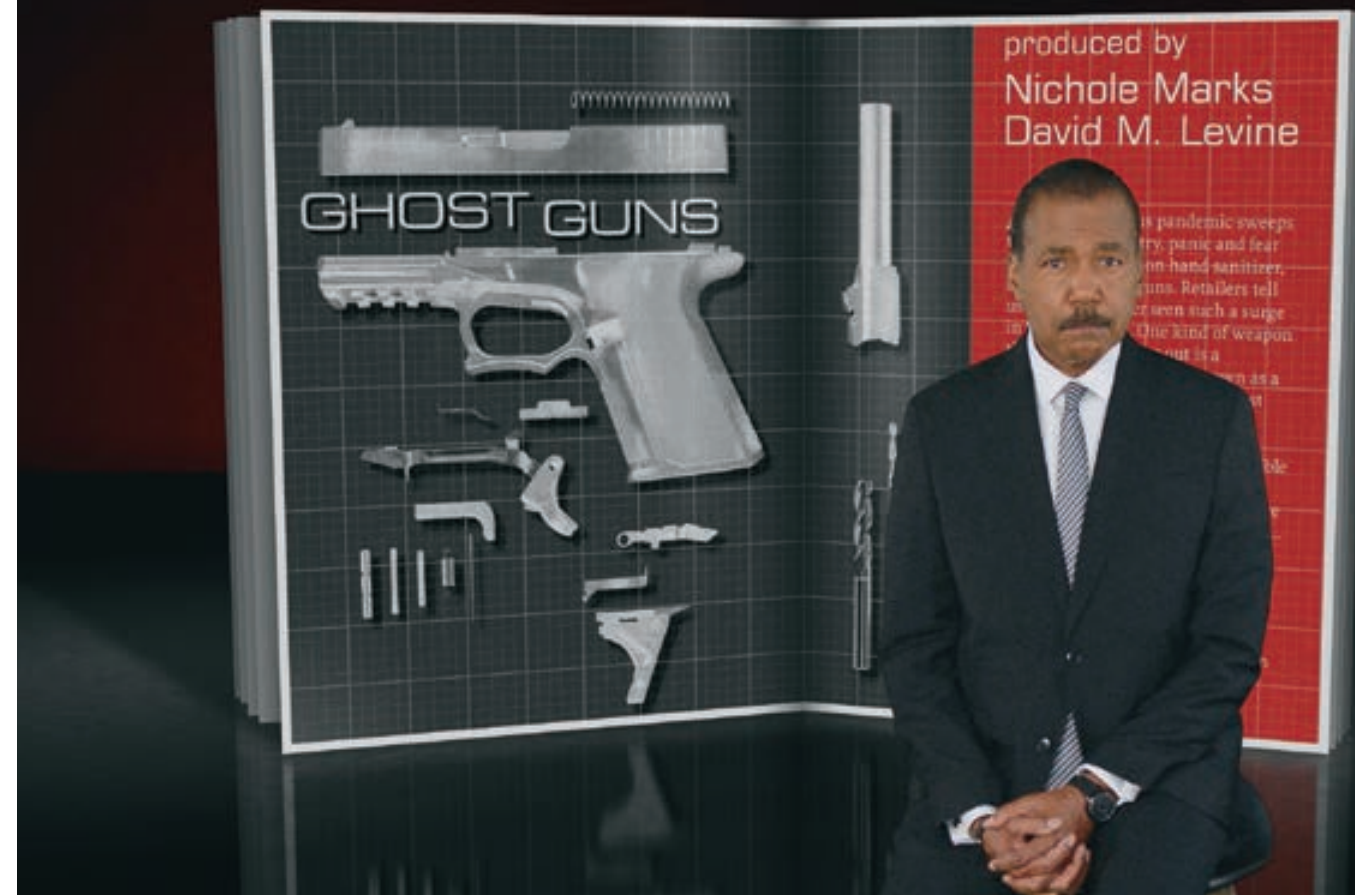
"You just saw that this issue is so raw it animates our worst instincts," he says. "It is in many ways the defining issue we've been grappling with from the beginning of this country. And we still haven't gotten there."

That moment 35 years ago gave Whitaker a new sense of mission, one that continues to this day: "I must do all I can to help this dialogue, to help people understand that we are one—Black, brown, Asian, Native American—to understand this is our country. And if I, as a journalist, can



do anything to help us work our way through this, hear each other, talk to each other, then I've done a good job."

In the years since with *CBS News*—and after 2014 as the second African-American correspondent on "60 Minutes"—Whitaker has covered all kinds of stories, all over America and around the world. In the early 1990s Whitaker worked in Tokyo as a *CBS News* correspondent where he reported on stories throughout Asia, including the pro-democracy uprising in Tiananmen Square. When he moved to Los Angeles, he spent more than two decades reporting for CBS Evening News and had a front row seat to major news stories like the O.J. Simpson trial, multiple presidential campaigns and interviewed prominent figures like ex-boxer Mike Tyson and Barbara Streisand. During his time with *CBS News*, Whitaker has covered wars in Afghanistan and Syria, the funeral of Nelson Mandela in South



Africa, the earthquake in Haiti and more. When Whitaker joined "60 Minutes," he continued to take a wide approach in finding stories and has reported on subjects ranging from the surge in mail-in voting ballots, El Chapo's escape and the development of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid vaccine to traveling by horseback down the longest running cattle drive in the United States and interviewing Rita Moreno.

Tonight, he is being honored with the Joseph M. Quinn Award for Lifetime Achievement at the Los Angeles Press Club's 64th annual Southern California Journalism Awards.

"The depth of Whitaker's reporting on a wide range of important issues has provided a valuable public service," says Press Club President Lisa Richwine. "Pieces on the opioid crisis and generic drugs, in particular, exposed behavior that made me wonder, 'How did they think they could

get away with that?' Whitaker's reporting helped make sure they didn't."

It's not hard to find people in awe of Whitaker's work. That includes his bosses.

"Bill Whitaker's reporting and storytelling is unmistakable," says Bill Owens, executive producer of "60 Minutes." "Bill is drawn to the most serious subjects of our time, bringing decades of experience to find the truth while educating our audience. Bill Whitaker's name belongs in the same breath as every legendary reporter who has ever worked for '60 Minutes.'"

William Whitaker II was born in Philadelphia on Aug. 26, 1951, and grew up in nearby Media, Penn. But the work that he would do covering racial justice was set in place seven years before.

In 1944, his mother, Marie V. Whitaker, accompanied by an African-American friend carrying her baby, was refused service at a local restaurant.

Two white women saw

Above: The studio opener for the Ghost Guns segment on "60 Minutes."

Opposite page: While assigned to Tokyo in the 1990s, Whitaker covered the uprising in Tiananmen Square.

Below: Over the years, Whitaker has covered the O.J. Simpson trial, seen in the audience during the verdict; followed the Dukakis presidential campaign, and ridden in the longest running cattle drive in the U.S.





Right: Whitaker exploring the tunnel through which El Chapo escaped prison.

Below: covering the George W. Bush campaign.



Above, a young Whitaker and his family, and Whitaker at 19 years.

all people without regard to race, culture, gender, age or disabilities," continues today.

"She was a nice woman and sort of turned that into her superpower," says Whitaker. He adds, "We moved our church affiliation from a Black church to a white church in the mid-50s. When this family of five well-scrubbed Black people showed up there was an exodus of the members. They wouldn't pray with us. Or sit next to us."

"I was aware of what was going on, but my mother sat in the same pew for the next 50 years and watched the church fall and rise up again around her," remembers Whitaker. "When she passed away, the church was full of people who came to say farewell to Marie Whitaker. And it was a diverse crowd."

When her son was invited to guest host "Jeopardy" for two weeks in May 2021, his choice of a charity to support was the Fellowship House.

Whitaker's father, William (the first), was also a civil rights advocate. The elder Whitaker attended the first March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963, where he heard Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech.

"They raised us to be proud of who we are," says Whitaker. "Both of them were very smart and both pushed education on all the children. One of my sisters is a lawyer, one was an executive in a corporation, and I'm a journalist. They said don't believe what the outside world is telling you about yourself. Know yourself and know who you are and what you can do. And don't be stopped."

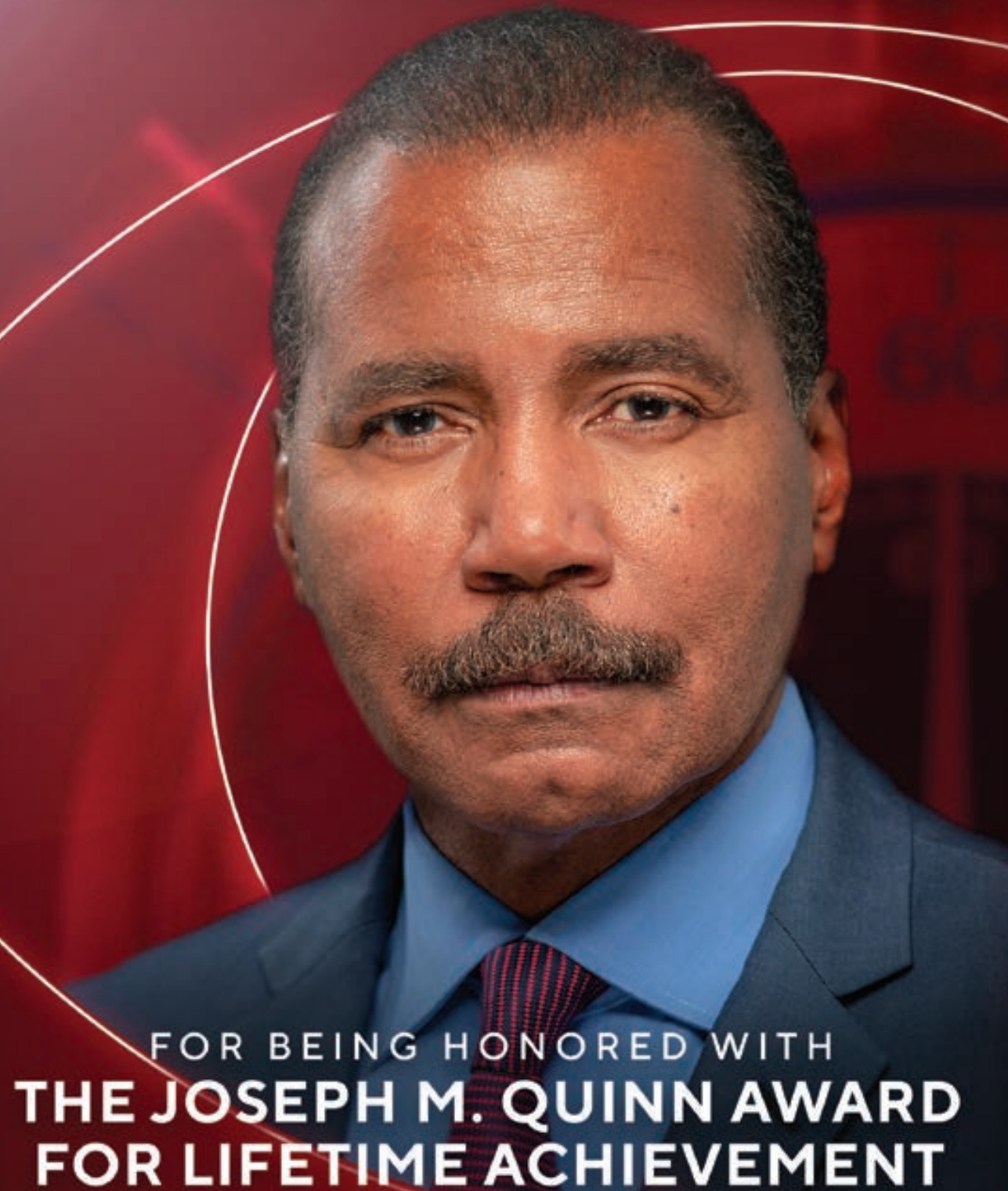
Despite his fame, Whitaker has kept his personal life private, and remains at heart a family man. He has been married to his wife, Terry, for almost 40 years. His son William III, now 34, started a financial company in New York City. His daughter Lesley, 32, joined a video game start-up in Berlin, Germany.

"She's loving it," says her proud dad.

Whitaker's advice to young journalists is to recognize that this moment in history calls for "serious journalism."

"We've got people who don't trust us," he says. "People who think that just because we are journalists, we are untrustworthy. I think the way to earn their trust back is just keep doing what we're doing with honesty and integrity and perseverance. We just keep at it. Like my mother sitting in that the same pew for 50 years." 🙏

CONGRATULATIONS BILL WHITAKER



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