

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wesley South

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	South, Wesley, 1914-2010
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South,
Dates:	July 18, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:56:29).
Abstract:	Radio personality Wesley South (1914 - 2010) is the former host of the WVON radio talk show, On Target, in Chicago. On his show South interviewed such luminaries as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, jazz great Duke Ellington, baseball pioneer Jackie Robinson, and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. South was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 18, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_037
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio personality Wesley South was born to Dr. Elijah and Mayme South on March 23, 1914, in Muskogee, Oklahoma. The family moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1924. South was educated in the Chicago public school system, graduating from Englewood High School.

During World War II, South served two years in the U.S. Army. After leaving the service, he enrolled at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. In 1951, he was hired by the Chicago Defender. In December of that year, he joined the editorial staff of Johnson Publishing Company, where he worked for nearly six years.

While working as a columnist doing public relations work for the NAACP in 1961, South was approached by a local radio executive who was afraid of being penalized by the Federation Communications Commission (FCC) for not having any African Americans on the air. The station executive asked South to host his own show. Then, in 1962, Leonard and Phil Chess of Chess Records bought the station and changed the call letters to WVON. Two years later, Wesley South's Hot Line began its sixteen-year run on WVON Radio. During that time, South interviewed such luminaries as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter; jazz great, Duke Ellington; baseball pioneer, Jackie Robinson; and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He became part owner of WVON Radio in 1979 and stayed in this capacity until the partnership dissolved.

South passed away on January 9, 2010 at the age of 95.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wesley South was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 18, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio personality Wesley South (1914 - 2010) is the former host of the WVON radio talk show, On Target, in Chicago. On his show South interviewed such luminaries as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, jazz great Duke Ellington, baseball pioneer Jackie Robinson, and civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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:

South, Wesley, 1914-2010

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

South, Wesley, 1914-2010--Interviews

African American radio broadcasters--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Radio personalities--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Oklahoma--Social life and customs

Rural-urban migration--United States

Early childhood education--Illinois--Chicago

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American

United States.Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century

Johnson Publishing Company

Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.)

Chicago (Ill.)--Politics and government

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987

Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Personality

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 Wesley South, July 18, 2000. 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 Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_001, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South begins by giving a detailed description of his family background and ancestry. South recalls his parents' separation and shares many anecdotes about the lives of his parents, grandparents, and other relatives. He also shares his earliest memories from growing up in Oklahoma.

African American radio broadcasters--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Radio personalities--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Oklahoma--Social life and customs.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Early childhood education--Illinois--Chicago.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

United States. Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century.

Nation of Islam (Chicago, Ill.).

Chicago (Ill.)--Politics and government.

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-.

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_002, TRT: 0:30:44 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South continues to describe his parents and explains why they chose to move to Chicago from Oklahoma. South recalls his first impressions of Chicago as a child, and talks about his adjustment to urban life. He also recounts his early schooling in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_003, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South recalls his high school and junior college years in Chicago. He talks at length about the occupational choices available to him before he joined the U.S. Army, describing his work as a salesman and a janitor. South details his experiences in the army during World War II, discussing segregation and racism in the armed forces. South describes the fighting that took place in Europe and tells of serving under white commanding officers.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_004, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South recalls encountering racial discrimination in the Army. He also discusses his decision to study journalism at Northwestern University, and details his early journalistic career with publications such as the Chicago Defender and Ebony magazine. South shares stories of covering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Adlai Stevenson, and Eleanor Roosevelt during his journalism career.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_005, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South discusses his work for John H. Johnson Publications and Ebony magazine and also discusses his employment at the Chicago American newspaper. South explains his transition into radio journalism at WHFC in Chicago, fulfilling the station's need to diversify. He explains how the station became the influential WVON and says how he became a part owner. He also details his relationship with Elijah Muhammad of the Nation of Islam.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_006, TRT: 0:31:01 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South explains the decision to change the format of WVON to all-talk in the 1980s. He then explains his involvement in Chicago politics, from helping his daughter Leslie South run for Cook County Associate Judge to teaming with Manford Byrd to assist Harold Washington in his campaign for Mayor. South also details his relationship with Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. and tells of public outcry on WVON after the death of Medgar Evers in 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_007, TRT: 0:31:19 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South explains the important role of talk radio during the Civil Rights Movement, exemplified by reaction to the death of Medgar Evers. South talks about the influence and legacy of his career and the pioneering radio station WVON. He also shares his views on issues concerning the black community, such as economic disparity, social problems, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. South also narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.

Video Oral History Interview with Wesley South, Section A2000_037_001_008, TRT: 0:21:11 ?

Radio personality Wesley W. South narrates his personal photographs as they are recorded on videotape.