

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Gardner Taylor

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Taylor, Gardner C
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor,
Dates:	March 5, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:22:26).
Abstract:	Theologian Reverend Gardner Taylor (1918 - 2015) was an honored theologian and Minister of Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn. Taylor was the founding president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and actively advocated for civil rights, social change and self-reliance as the pastor of four churches throughout his career. Taylor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 5, 2002, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_006
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on June 18, 1918, as the only child of an educated mother and a Baptist preacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Gardner Calvin Taylor began on the path that would eventually lead to becoming the influential senior pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York. His peers named him the greatest African American preacher and one of America's greatest preachers in *Ebony* magazine in 1993. President Bill Clinton agreed in 2000 when he bestowed upon Taylor the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Despite his background, Taylor was agnostic until his involvement in a 1937 car accident in which a man died. This incident awoke his spirituality. Consequently, he enrolled in the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology in 1937, where he met and married Laura Bell Scott. They have one daughter, Martha. While still in school, he preached at Bethany Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio from 1938 to 1941.

Taylor actively advocated civil rights, social change and self-reliance as pastor for four churches. He allied himself with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the progressive civil rights wing of the National Baptist Convention. Taylor sought the presidency of the National Baptist Church Convention in 1961. After losing, he and his followers formed the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Taylor taught at prominent divinity schools, including Harvard and Yale. As Senior Pastor Emeritus of Concord, he traveled extensively around the world and used his experiences in his preaching.

Reverend Gardner Taylor passed away on April 5, 2015 at the age of 96.

Bibliography:

English, Merle. "Clinton Lauds Pastor for 'Moral Compass.'" *Long Island (NY) Newsday*, 11 August 2000.

Thomas, Gerald L. "African American Preaching: The Contribution of Gardner C. Taylor." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1993.

Thurman, Howard, ed. *Why I Believe There Is a God*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1965.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 5, 2002, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Theologian Reverend Gardner Taylor (1918 - 2015) was an honored theologian and Minister of Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn. Taylor was the founding president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and actively advocated for civil rights, social change and self-reliance as the pastor of four churches throughout his career.

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:

Taylor, Gardner C

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Taylor, Gardner C--Interviews

African American clergy--New York (State)--New York--Brooklyn--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews

Segregation--Louisiana--Baton Rouge

African Americans--Louisiana--Baton Rouge--Social life and customs

Traffic accidents

Oberlin Collegiate Institute

Civil rights--Religious aspects--Christianity

Civil rights movement

National Baptist Convention of America

Fires--New York (State)--New York

Aboriginal Australians--Social conditions

Clinton, Bill, 1946-

Presidential Medal of Freedom

Black theology

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Theologian

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 Gardner Taylor, March 5, 2002. 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 Gardner Taylor, Section A2002_006_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Gardner C.Taylor shares his recollections of his childhood and youth. He briefly recalls his parents' lives, such as their occupations and how they met. He describes growing up as an only child in segregated Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and how the black community was influenced by the presence of two African American institutions of higher learning (Southern University and Leland College.) Taylor also discusses his early educational experiences.

African American clergy--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Segregation--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

African Americans--Louisiana--Baton Rouge--Social life and customs.

Traffic accidents.

Oberlin Collegiate Institute.

Civil rights--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Civil rights movements.

National Baptist Convention of America.

Fires--New York (State)--New York.

Aboriginal Australians--Social conditions.

Clinton, Bill, 1946-.

Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Black theology.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor, Section A2002_006_001_002, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Gardner C.Taylor shares some of his childhood memories of his family, dwelling especially on how they managed after the death of his father. He then details his path towards higher education -- his law school aspirations, the traffic accident (in which two white men were killed) that changed his course towards the seminary, and his subsequent preparations for Oberlin College. Taylor also describes his experiences at Oberlin, particularly the racial climate. He concludes by remembering how he met his future wife.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor, Section A2002_006_001_003, TRT: 0:22:55 ?

Gardner C.Taylor discusses his early career and marriage, including his courtship, his return to the South to become a pastor, and how he and his wife adjusted to segregation after their years in Ohio. He describes the black community in Louisiana, in terms of both its vibrancy, and the deeply-rooted skin color prejudice. Taylor then details the challenges he faced as a young, inexperienced pastor, particularly in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, as the role of the black church and church leaders became ever more crucial.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor, Section A2002_006_001_004, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Gardner C.Taylor begins and ends the interview with a detailed description of the events that led to the rift in the National Baptist Convention over civil rights, and the subsequent creation of the Progressive National Baptist Convention. The rest of the interview is devoted to his transition to Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York, and the challenges he met with there -- such as the fire that burned the church to the ground. Taylor also describes his travels to Copenhagen and later Australia, where he spoke with Australian Aborigines about their mutual obstacles to equality.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Gardner Taylor, Section A2002_006_001_005, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Gardner C.Taylor revisits the formation of the Progressive National Baptist Convention in 1963. He also briefly mentions being awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Clinton. The rest of the interview is dedicated to theology, in terms of both his personal philosophy, and the evolving concerns of black theologians in general. He also speculates on the future of the black community, the nation, humankind, and how his own legacy might influence it. Taylor concludes by listing his favorite theologians, and reciting his favorite passage of the Bible.