

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lillie Mae Wesley

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Wesley, Lillie Mae, 1921-2010 |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lillie Mae Wesley, |
| Dates: | November 20, 2002 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2002 |
| Physical Description: | 3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:24:05). |
| Abstract: | City parks administrator and community activist Lillie Mae Wesley (1921 - 2010) worked and served her community in Long Beach, California, through the park district and St. Mark Baptist Church. Wesley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 20, 2002, in Long Beach, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2002_206 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Building a better community in her adopted hometown of Long Beach, California, occupied Lillie Mae Wesley nearly all her life. Born in Texarkana, Texas, on June 11, 1921, Wesley spent her childhood in Texas. In 1942, she married Ovid Wesley, who served in the Army during World War II. As her husband prepared to leave the service in 1944, Wesley moved to Long Beach, where her sister lived. Wesley took the opportunity afforded by her husband's return to pursue an education. She began at Long Beach City College and later attended Pacific College before completing her studies at Long Beach State University, where she received a B.A. in recreation and human services.

Both professionally and personally, Wesley worked to help people, especially the less fortunate, in Long Beach. Her first job in California was with the Salvation Army, where she worked for eleven years managing distribution of used clothing and furniture to thrift stores around the area. In the 1950s, Wesley took a position with the City of Long Beach, working in the Department of Recreation. She served in several capacities, including outreach to senior citizens, before retiring in 1980 as supervisor of the Park District.

Outside of her career, Wesley actively and selflessly served her community through her church, St. Mark Baptist Church. With the help of her church and fellow parishioners, Wesley established the first storehouse for the elderly in Long Beach. She also helped elderly, illiterate blacks complete application forms and other paperwork to receive entitlement benefits.

Though she never sought special recognition for her outreach, Wesley received several citations and commendations for her service. She received the Employee of the Year Award from the city of Long Beach in 1980, was recognized by Los Angeles County on Older Americans Recognition Day in 1996, was awarded a certificate from the Family Life Foundation for her service to Long Beach families, and was congratulated by Congress for her life's work and service. In 1992, Wesley became the first black grand marshal in the history of the

Long Beach Inaugural Parade.

Wesley and her husband were married fifty-nine years. They have one daughter and one granddaughter. Wesley passed away on May 21, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lillie Mae Wesley was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 20, 2002, in Long Beach, California, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. City parks administrator and community activist Lillie Mae Wesley (1921 - 2010) worked and served her community in Long Beach, California, through the park district and St. Mark Baptist Church.

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:

Wesley, Lillie Mae, 1921-2010

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wesley, Lillie Mae, 1921-2010--Interviews

Community activists--Interviews

African American women civic leaders--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Long Beach (Calif.). Dept. of Recreation and Human Services.

Occupations:

City Parks Administrator

Community Activist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Lillie Mae Wesley, November 20, 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 Lillie Mae Wesley, Section A2002_206_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00
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Lillie Mae Wesley describes her family background. Her father, James Butler was born in the 1880s in Arkansas. As a young man, he settled briefly in Ashdown, Arkansas before moving to Texarkana, Texas, where he met his wife, Sallie Sumerall. Sumerall was born in the 1880s, presumably in Texarkana, Texas. After marrying, Butler and Sumerall gave birth to their fourth child, Lillie Mae Wesley, on June 11, 1921. James Butler worked his way from day laborer to landowner. As a child, Wesley worked on her father's dairy farm, as well as on the family's traditional farm property. She also helped tend to her mother's flower garden, and enjoyed playing sports with local farm children. Wesley learned to play the piano and sew as a youth, as well. Wesley's parents enrolled her at Dunbar Elementary School, one faction of a three-part school in Texarkana, Texas, in the mid-1920s. Wesley talks about the rivalry between Dunbar High School and Booker T. Washington High School in Texarkana, Arkansas, as well.

Community activists--Interviews.

African American women civic leaders--Interviews.

African American Women Educators

African American children--Texas.

Segregation in education--Texas--Texarkana.

Farm life--Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Lillie Mae Wesley, Section A2002_206_001_002, TRT: 0:30:10
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Lillie Mae Wesley graduated from Dunbar High School in Texarkana, Texas in 1938. Afterwards, she helped her prominent farmer father, James Butler, manage the family's farm as he expanded it. She also attended Bishop College Extension School part time for one year. In 1942, Wesley married Ovid Wesley, and the two relocated to Long Beach, California in 1944 after he was discharged from the U.S. Army. Wesley helped her husband through his high school and college studies and Long Beach Polytechnic High School and Long Beach City College, respectively. Wesley obtained a two-year certificate from Long Beach City College, and later enrolled in California State University, Long Beach, which she attended part-time for twelve years. In the 1950s, Wesley was hired by the City of Long Beach Parks and Recreation Department. By the time her husband made her retire in 1980, she had risen to supervisor of the City of Long Beach Park District.

African American farmers--Texas.

African American families--California--Long Beach.

African American couples--California.

African American families--Texas--Texarkana.

California State University, Long Beach.

Miscegenation--Texas

Video Oral History Interview with Lillie Mae Wesley, Section A2002_206_001_003, TRT: 0:23:55
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Lillie Mae Wesley chaired the Women's Auxiliary for the Long Beach branch of the NAACP. She worked with the group to raise money for the NAACP as they fought local discrimination cases, and attended the NAACP's national conferences. Wesley was also heavily involved in her church, St. Mark Baptist Church. After she retired from her position as Supervisor of the City of Long Beach Park District in 1980, Wesley enjoyed being a wife to her husband, Ovid Wesley. Wesley had an immeasurable amount of respect for her husband, and refused court anyone or re-marry after he passed away in 1996. Wesley talks about the importance of treating others well, as well as how she would like to be remembered. She close the interview by narrating her photographs.

Spirituality

Civil Rights--California--Long Beach.

Community Activists--California--Long Beach.

Fund raising.

NAACP, Long Beach Chapter (Long Beach, CA)