

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Quentin Mease

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: | Mease, Quentin R., 1908-2009 |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, |
| Dates: | November 2, 2004 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2004 |
| Physical Description: | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:04:30). |
| Abstract: | Nonprofit chief executive Quentin Mease (1908 - 2009) served as the executive director of the Bagby Street YMCA in Houston, Texas, where he built a new facility which became the South Central YMCA. As leader of the new YMCA, Mease founded the Houston Area Urban League, the Eliza Johnson Home and the Houston Council on Human Relations. Mease passed away on February 24, 2009. Mease was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 2, 2004, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2004_224 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

YMCA executive and civic leader Quentin Ronald Mease was born October 25, 1908 in the now extinct, black populated, coal mining town of Buxton, Iowa. His father was a coal miner, labor leader and Justice of the Peace. Mease's mother was a seamstress and businesswoman. Mease attended Second Street Elementary School in Buxton. When his father died in 1920, the Mease family moved to Des Moines, Iowa where Mease was active with the Crocker Branch YMCA. He graduated from West High School in 1924 and Des Moines University in 1928. During the same period Mease went from Crocker Branch YMCA volunteer to nineteen-year-old executive director in 1927. He was active in the NAACP, the Interracial Commission and the Negro Chamber of Commerce.

In 1942, Mease was inducted into the United States Army Air Corps. where he rose from the rank of enlisted man to Captain while serving in the Pacific Theatre of World War II. His squadron under General MacArthur, landed at Hiroshima one week after the atomic bomb dropped in 1945.

After earning a Masters degree in social work administration in 1948 from George Williams College in Chicago, Illinois, Mease accepted the position of executive director of the Bagby Street YMCA in Houston, Texas. There, he launched a successful building campaign for a new facility, which became the South Central YMCA. As leader of the new YMCA, Mease founded the Houston Area Urban League, the Eliza Johnson Home, and the Houston Council on Human Relations. These institutions led to the peaceful desegregation of Houston's public facilities. When student protesters at Texas Southern University needed a new headquarters, Mease let them use the YMCA. Mease has served on over thirty non-profit boards in Des Moines, Chicago and Houston and raised an estimated \$270 million dollars.

Mease was a founder and chairman for nineteen years of the Harris County Hospital District and chaired the Harris

County Hospital Foundation. He was Emeritus Member of the Baylor College of Medicine and the Texas Medical Center. The naming of Houston's Quentin R. Mease Community Hospital is one of many honors garnered by Mease's community work. The late Congressman Mickey Leland read a tribute to Mease into the congressional record in 1981. Mease's wife, Jewell, passed away in 1978. He also had a grown daughter and grandson.

Mease passed away on February 24, 2009.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Quentin Mease was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 2, 2004, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive Quentin Mease (1908 - 2009) served as the executive director of the Bagby Street YMCA in Houston, Texas, where he built a new facility which became the South Central YMCA. As leader of the new YMCA, Mease founded the Houston Area Urban League, the Eliza Johnson Home and the Houston Council on Human Relations. Mease passed away on February 24, 2009.

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:

Mease, Quentin R., 1908-2009

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Mease, Quentin R., 1908-2009--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Quentin Mease, November 2, 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 Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_001, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Quentin Mease was born on October 25, 1908 in Buxton, Iowa. His mother, Cornelia Tate Mease, was born in Charlottesville, Virginia in the 1860s. She received some education while growing up in Charlottesville but most likely did not reach the high school level. A seamstress by trade, she also ran a small poultry business and invested in real estate in Oklahoma and Iowa. She had siblings that also moved to Iowa, but she was not close to her family. Mease's father, Charles Mease, was born and raised in Staunton, Virginia. He moved to Muchakinock, Iowa to join the coal mining industry before settling with Mease's mother in Buxton. Mease's maternal grandfather, Joseph Henry Tate, worked as a carpenter while enslaved on a plantation in Charlottesville. Towards the end of the American Civil War, he was drafted to serve as an orderly in the Confederate Army. He passed away when Mease was still a child, yet Mease fondly recalls his grandfather's re-enactment of the Civil War at the dinner table on Sundays.

Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Quentin Mease and his siblings were raised in Buxton, Iowa, a coal mining town with a large African American population. Unlike most of the country during the 1930s and 1940s, Buxton was not segregated. Mease attended Fifth Street Grade School where all his teachers were black. His father, Charles Mease moved to Buxton originally to work in the coal mines, but soon established himself as an entrepreneur, a justice of the peace, chairman of the board of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and a labor organizer with John L. Lewis. After his father's death in 1918, Mease's family moved to Des Moines, Iowa where he completed his elementary education. While growing up, Mease was strongly influenced by his father's leadership and his own strong ties to the YMCA. In 1942, after graduating from George Williams College in Chicago, Illinois, he accepted an offer to direct the YMCA in Houston, Texas and help expand its facilities. He also recalls the desegregation of Chicago YMCAs in the 1940s.

Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_003, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Quentin Mease graduated from West High School in Des Moines, Iowa in 1931. Inspired by Iowa native Archie Alexander, the first black civil engineer, Mease enrolled in Des Moines University with plans of becoming a civil engineer. He also worked part-time with his brother as a maintenance contractor and as an executive at the local YMCA. In 1942, Mease was drafted into the U.S. military after completing induction and training at Camp Dodge, Iowa, he was assigned to duty at Dale Mabry Field in Tallahassee, Florida. While traveling to Florida, Mease experienced segregated train cars for the first time. At Dale Mabry Field, he quickly rose in rank to become a technical sergeant major. Following Officer Candidate School, Mease served in the Pacific Theater of World War II as part of General Douglas MacArthur's administrative staff. Mease landed in Hiroshima, Japan one week after the atomic bomb dropped in 1945. He was a material expeditor who ordered supplied for all the bases in the region.

Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_004, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Quentin Mease served in the U.S. Army Air Corps from 1942 to 1945, where he rose in rank from enlisted man to captain. While serving in the Pacific Theater, his squadron, under General Douglas MacArthur, landed in Hiroshima, Japan one week after the atomic bomb dropped in 1945. Mease witnessed the return of civilians to the city just a month after the bomb was dropped. After his return from World War II, he visited New York City, then enrolled in George Williams College in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating with his master's degree in social work administration in 1948, he was then recruited to become the executive

director of the Bagby Street YMCA in Houston, Texas. In spite of the initial distrust from the community, he successfully established the YMCA in a brand new facility, expanded the board and increased membership goals from \$1,800 to \$60,000. Mease also recruited a law student working part-time at the YMCA to initiate sit-ins in Houston that were already taking place in the South.

Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_005, TRT: 0:31:18 ?

Quentin Mease served as the executive director of the Bagby Street YMCA in Houston, Texas from 1948 to 1976. During this time, he supported Eldrewey Joseph Stearns and the Progressive Youth Movement in leading Houston's first student sit-ins to desegregate lunch counters. Mease was criticized for his support of the sit-ins since the YMCA was expected to remain uninvolved in controversial issues. Mease also involved local business leaders in supporting the United Negro College Fund. As the leader of the new YMCA, Mease became well acquainted with the leaders of Houston's business and political scenes including John T. Jones, the nephew and heir of Jesse H. Jones, and the Hobby family. He served on the board of the Harris County Hospital District at a time when he was its only black member, and founded the Urban League Houston, Texas chapter.

Video Oral History Interview with Quentin Mease, Section A2004_224_001_006, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Quentin Mease was honored by having the Quentin Mease Community Hospital named after him; however, he was the only member of the hospital board to vote against its naming because he felt credit was due to many other people who worked hard and not just him. Mease's mother died in 1964 and was unable to witness the full success of his career. At the time of the interview, his daughter was living in California. In reflecting upon his career, Mease emphasizes the importance of leadership and his belief that a business background can best equip one to lead at the community, state and national levels. Mease describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he wants to be remembered. He reflects upon his legacy. He closes the interview by narrating his photographs.