

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Margaret Bush Wilson

PERSON

Wilson, Margaret Bush, 1919-2009

**Alternative Names:** Margaret Bush Wilson; Margaret Bush

**Life Dates:** January 30, 1919-August 11, 2009

**Place of Birth:** St. Louis, Missouri, USA

**Residence:** Saint Louis, Missouri

**Occupations:** Real Estate Lawyer; Association Branch Chief Executive

## Biographical Note

NAACP leader, activist attorney Margaret Bush Wilson was born Margaret Bush on January 30, 1919, in St. Louis, Missouri. Wilson's father, a railway postal clerk, James Thomas Bush was a 1900 Prairie View A&M graduate and her mother, Margaret Bernice Casey Bush taught kindergarten. Both of Wilson's parents were active in the local NAACP, with her mother serving as an executive board member. Wilson attended grade school on the grounds of Sumner High School where lifelong friend Julia Davis mentored her. After graduating from Sumner High School in 1935, Wilson enrolled at Talladega College where she was awarded a Juliette Derricotte Fellowship to study at Visva-Bharati University in India, and where she met Nobel Prize winning poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Wilson graduated in 1939 with her B.S. degree in economics. A beneficiary of the Gains v. Canada law suit, Wilson enrolled in Missouri's newly created Lincoln University Law School, graduating and passing the bar in 1943. Wilson was in the second class which had one other woman enrolled; she was the second woman of color admitted to practice in Missouri, joining Dorothy Freeman, Edith Sampson, Frankie Freeman, Sadie Alexander and other female law pioneers.

Starting as a clerk/secretary for attorney David Grant, Wilson was soon hired by the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Electrification Administration. Marrying Robert E. Wilson in 1944, Wilson joined her husband in Chicago as he finished Kent College of Law. In 1946, Wilson returned to St. Louis and started the law firm Wilson and Wilson with her husband. Wilson's specialty was real estate law, which complimented her father's profession as a realtor. Wilson served as counsel for the black Real Estate Brokers Association, initiated by her father, and was instrumental in Shelley v. Kramer, a 1948 Supreme Court ruling that held housing covenants unenforceable. Active in the St. Louis NAACP, Wilson became St. Louis NAACP branch president in 1958 and worked cooperatively with Marion Oldham of CORE.

During Wilson's presidency, the NAACP won several civil rights cases including the Rankin Trade School Case and the Jefferson Bank case. In 1962, Wilson became president of the Missouri NAACP. During President Lyndon Johnson's administration, Wilson served as deputy director of the Model Cities Program. As head of Lawyers for Housing in 1966, Wilson proposed the creation of one thousand new units of housing. In 1975, Wilson became chairman of the national NAACP board, serving nine terms.

During the 1980s, Wilson served as chairman of the board of the Mutual Insurance Company of New York, Real Estate Investment Trust. Wilson was also past board chairman of two historically black colleges, St. Augustine's College and Talladega, in addition to serving on numerous boards for national companies and nonprofit organizations. A trustee-emeritae of Washington University and Webster University, Wilson served as chair of Law Day 2000 for the American Bar Association.

Wilson, whose hero was Celie, the victim in a nineteenth century Missouri slavery trial, raised one son and was continuing to practice law in St. Louis at the time of her HistoryMakers interview.

Wilson passed away on August 11, 2009 at the age of 90.

## Related Entries

**Charles H. Sumner High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Lincoln University School of Law** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Talladega College** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Department of Community Affairs** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Model Cities** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Director**

**Lawyers for Housing** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Real Estate Brokers Association of St. Louis** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1948 to ?]

**Member**

**NAACP** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1958 to 1962]

**Chapter President**

**NAACP** [MEMBEROF]

[from 1974 to 1983]

**Chairman**