

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Aaron Dixon

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dixon, Aaron Floyd
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon,
Dates:	July 26, 2019, June 6, 2008 and October 24, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007, 2008 and 2019
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:21:10).
Abstract:	Community activist Aaron Dixon (1949 -) was a founding member and captain of the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party. He founded the non-profit organization, Central House and ran for the U.S. Senate in 2006. Dixon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 26, 2019, June 6, 2008 and October 24, 2007, in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Seattle, Washington. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_301
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Community activist Aaron Lloyd Dixon was born on January 2, 1949 in Chicago, Illinois to Frances Sledge Dixon and Elmer James Dixon. The Dixons were leftist activists and valued the importance of fighting social injustice. Dixon moved to Seattle, Washington in 1958, when his father accepted a job as a technical illustrator for the United States Air Force. In 1961, at age eleven, Dixon walked alongside Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his march to end housing discrimination in Seattle. He attended Coleman Elementary School, Blaine Junior High School and in 1963, became one of the first African American youth to integrate predominantly white Queen Anne High School.

In 1967, Dixon attended Washington University and joined the local SNCC chapter. As a member of SNCC, Dixon met the black radical Larry Gossett, and co-founded the Seattle Area Black Student Union (SABSU). As members of the SABSU, Dixon, Gossett, and Dixon's younger brother, Elmer, promoted self determination, self-respect and self defense throughout Seattle's black community. In 1968, after attending funeral services in Oakland, California for seventeen-year-old Bobby Hutton, a founding member of the Black Panther Party that was shot down by Oakland police, Dixon, Gossett, and others established the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party. As founding member and captain of the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party, Dixon helped launch the Free Breakfast for School Children Program, which fed over 10,000 children every day before school. Dixon was also instrumental in the opening of a free medical and legal clinic.

In 1970, Congress began its full scale investigation of the Black Panther Party with much of its focus on the activities of the Seattle chapter. Although the investigation would lead to the demise of the Black Panther Party's many major city chapters, the Seattle chapter would last longer than most. Dixon moved to Oakland, the national headquarters of the Black Panther Party, in 1972. There, he served as a bodyguard for chairperson Elaine Brown. Dixon worked on the mayoral campaign of Lionel Wilson in 1978, helping him to become Oakland, California's

first African American mayor.

In 2002, Dixon founded the non-profit organization, Central House, to provide transitional housing for homeless young adults. Central House currently contains a youth leadership project that teaches youth to think positively, graduate high school and to control their destinies. In 2006, the Green Party of Washington nominated Dixon for the U.S. Senate. Following his campaign for U.S. Senate, Dixon organized the Center for Social Justice based out of the Seattle Central District. The Center for Social Justice organized an anti-war rally and march in January 2007.

Dixon was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 24, 2007 June 6, 2008 and July 26, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Aaron Dixon was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 26, 2019, June 6, 2008 and October 24, 2007, in Albuquerque, New Mexico and Seattle, Washington, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Community activist Aaron Dixon (1949 -) was a founding member and captain of the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party. He founded the non-profit organization, Central House and ran for the U.S. Senate in 2006.

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:

Dixon, Aaron Floyd

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Dixon, Aaron Floyd--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Black Panther Party.

Occupations:

Community Activist

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 Aaron Dixon, July 26, 2019, June 6, 2008 and October 24, 2007. 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 Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_001_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Aaron Dixon was born on January 2, 1949 in Chicago, Illinois to Frances Sledge Dixon and Elmer Dixon, Jr. His paternal grandmother, Mildred West Dixon, was descended from the first slaves to join the Union Army; who, after the Civil War, acquired their slaveholder's plantation. In 1919, after his paternal grandfather, Elmer Dixon, Sr., was disowned by his millionaire father, Dixon's grandparents moved to Chicago. Dixon's maternal grandmother, Josephine Sledge, left Mississippi to escape the discrimination against biracial children, and lived in Chicago with her aunt, who also treated her poorly due to her mixed ancestry. After college, she worked as a domestic, and married Dixon's maternal grandfather, Roy Sledge, who was an alcoholic. She sent Dixon's mother to St. Paul, Minnesota, where she grew up away from her father's abuse. Later, she returned to Chicago, and married Dixon's father, a World War II veteran who had experienced racial discrimination in the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_001_002, TRT: 0:31:40 ?

Aaron Dixon's father, Elmer Dixon, Jr., served in the Pacific Theatre during World War II, and witnessed the U.S. Army's brutal treatment of Japanese civilians. After the war, he joined the Communist Party in Chicago, Illinois, and provided security during Paul Robeson's visit to Soldier Field. He also studied technical illustration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He married Dixon's mother in 1946, and moved to Champaign, Illinois to work at the Chanute Air Force Base. Dixon lived briefly on Chicago's Langley Street, and spent most of his early childhood in Burch Village, an all-black community in Champaign. At eight years old, he moved with his family to Seattle, Washington, where his father had obtained a position at The Boeing Company. Dixon's father painted in his free time, and befriended a multicultural group of politically active artists. Although Dixon's parents rarely shared with him the details of the Civil Rights Movement, they often spoke out against racial discrimination.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_001_003, TRT: 0:27:50 ?

Aaron Dixon attended Washington Elementary School in Champaign, Illinois. After moving with his family to Seattle, Washington, Dixon transferred to the Colman School, and then attended David T. Denny Junior High School. After Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Seattle, Dixon was inspired to join a busing program to help integrate Queen Anne High School in 1963. He faced discrimination from his teachers there, and ultimately transferred to the majority African American Garfield High School. There, his English teacher praised his writing, and he joined the debate team. During his childhood, Dixon considered becoming a police officer or joining the U.S. Marine Corps, but his father strongly discouraged both aspirations. Upon graduating in 1967, he was awarded a scholarship to attend the University of Washington in Seattle. With his fellow activists Larry Gossett and Carl Miller, Dixon established a Black Student Union, and invited speakers like Berkeley city councilman Ronald Dellums to campus.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_002_004, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Aaron Dixon helped to found the Black Student Union (BSU) at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington in 1967. The next year, the BSU occupied the president's office to demand more professors of color and the creation of a black studies program. The BSU also successfully protested the unequal punishment of black and white students at Franklin High School. Afterwards, Dixon was charged with unlawful assembly, and jailed on the day of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. After his release, Dixon traveled to San Francisco, California to take part in the West Coast Black Student Union Conference. He attended the memorial service for Bobby Hutton, a Black Panther Party (BPP) member killed by police; and, after hearing Bobby Seale's keynote address, was moved to form a BPP chapter in Seattle. There, Dixon served as captain of the first chapter outside of California. Seale invited him on the campaign to establish new chapters, but Dixon declined to focus on Seattle.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_002_005, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Aaron Dixon was invited to Oakland, California in his role as the captain of the Black Panther Party (BPP) chapter in Seattle, Washington. In Oakland, he was mentored by former U.S. military members of the party like Robert Bay, Tommy Jones and Landon Williams, and saw their arsenal of weapons. During his brief visit, he was involved in a confrontation with the police that narrowly avoided bloodshed. Dixon describes the history of the BPP, which formed in response to violence against African Americans. Although the party's logo originated with SNCC activist Stokely Carmichael and the southern voter registration movement, the organization itself emerged in Oakland due to the ongoing police brutality. The BPP espoused the right to self-defense by any means necessary, and advocated the use of firearms by African Americans. In response to the actions of the BPP, California passed the Mulford Act, which made it illegal to carry firearms adjacent to public property in 1967.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_002_006, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Aaron Dixon established a chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in Seattle, Washington with the support of his parents, who raised him to be politically-minded. The chapter responded to calls from community members in need of protection, including victims of domestic abuse. When black students at Rainier Beach High School were assaulted by their white peers, the BPP successfully demanded protection from the school principal. In May of 1968, Dixon and the party leadership appealed to the United Nations to ensure a fair trial for party founder Huey P. Newton. While organizing the appeal, BPP leaders Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale argued with James Forman, the executive secretary of SNCC, whom they saw as trying to usurp their power. This disagreement ended the potential merger of SNCC and the BPP; and, without Forman's connections, the party had an audience with only the Tanzanian delegation. Upon his return to Seattle, Dixon was wrongly arrested for theft, inciting the city's first major riot.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_002_007, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Aaron Dixon and his Black Panther Party (BPP) chapter were in constant conflict with the police in Seattle, Washington during the summer of 1968. The Seattle Police Department put out a contract for Dixon's assassination, and the party was infiltrated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). On one occasion, Dixon was accosted by a police officer while walking home, and was narrowly rescued by a conservative African American neighbor. Hoping to clear his name, Dixon conducted a speaking tour in Chicago, Illinois, where he met BPP member Fred Hampton. In 1969, the FBI devised a plot to dismantle the Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle chapters of the BPP. Dixon was warned by a

member of the local justice department, and fortified his offices; but Hampton was assassinated by the Chicago police on December 4, 1969. Earlier that year, BBP members Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were killed by The Organization US, a rival black nationalist group founded by Maulana Karenga.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_002_008, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Aaron Dixon learned of Fred Hampton's assassination from Black Panther Party (BPP) leader June Hilliard. Afterwards, federal agents raided the BPP office in Los Angeles, California. They also requested permission from Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman to raid Dixon's offices, but Mayor Uhlman refused. During this time, the Black Panther Party established the Free Breakfast for School Children Program, as well as programs for free legal aid, and busing to the prisons. Dixon founded the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center, which remained open in Seattle at the time of the interview. Across the country, the BPP operated liberation schools, which were attended by rap artists Tupac Shakur and Chuck D. as children in New York City. As the BPP gained international renown, its members were given diplomatic immunity in Algeria and North Korea, and some fled abroad. After BPP founder Huey P. Newton was released from prison in 1971, a public disagreement between him and BPP leader Eldridge Cleaver led to a schism in the party.

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_003_009, TRT: 9:29:35 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_003_010, TRT: 10:28:53 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_003_011, TRT: 11:29:03 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_003_012, TRT: 12:28:29 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Aaron Dixon, Section A2007_301_003_013, TRT: 13:27:10 ?