

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable A C Wharton, Jr.

PERSON

Wharton, A C, Jr., 1944-

Alternative Names: The Honorable A C Wharton, Jr.;

Life Dates: August 17, 1944-

Place of Birth: Lebanon, Tennessee, USA

Residence: Memphis, Tennessee

Work: Memphis, Tennessee

Occupations: Mayor

Biographical Note

Mayor A C Wharton, Jr. was born on August 17, 1944 in Lebanon, Tennessee. In 1966, he graduated from Tennessee State University with his B.A. degree in political science. Wharton then received his J.D. degree in 1971 from the University of Mississippi School of Law, where he graduated with honors and was one of the first African American students to serve on the Moot Court Board and the first to serve on the Judicial Council.

Wharton first worked in Washington, D.C., at the Office of General Council of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for two years, and then for a year at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, where he headed the Public Employment Project. In 1973, Wharton moved to Memphis, Tennessee and was hired as executive director of Memphis Area Legal Services, a nonprofit organization providing civil legal assistance to low-income citizens. Then, in 1974, he became the University of Mississippi's first African American professor of law, a position that he would hold for twenty-five years.

In 1980, then-Shelby County, Tennessee mayor, Bill Morris, appointed Wharton as Shelby County's Chief Public Defender. Wharton chaired the county's Jail Overcrowding Committee; and, in 1982, wrote and saw passed one of the first state laws in the United States to combat domestic violence. In addition to his role as a public defender, Wharton and his wife established the law firm of Wharton and Wharton in 1980.

In 2002, Wharton was elected as the first African American Mayor of Shelby County, and was re-elected in 2006. As Shelby County Mayor, he established Operation Safe Community, the area's first comprehensive crime-fighting plan, developed the community's first smart growth and sustainability plan, and tackled education and early childhood development issues with programs like "Books from Birth" and "Ready, Set, Grow." Wharton also improved the management and accountability of the County's Head Start program. His reforms attracted the attention of the United States Congress, where he was called to testify before the House Committee on Education.

In October of 2009, Wharton was elected as the Mayor of the City of Memphis, and was re-elected in 2011. He is a member of the Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition, and has addressed major policy institutions and conferences of the Brookings Institute, CEOs for Cities, and the National Association for Counties.

Wharton lives in Memphis with his wife, Ruby. They have raised six sons.

A C Wharton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 26, 2014.

Related Entries

Market Street Elementary PS [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Wilson County Training School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Diploma

Harvard Law School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Tennessee State University [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

B.S.

Harvard Law School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

1 Year - 1966-67

University of Mississippi [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Juris Doctorate

[EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

City of Memphis [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 200910 to ?]

Mayor

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office of General Counsel

[EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1971 to 1972]

Attorney

Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1972 to 1973]

Attorney

Memphis Area Legal Services [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1973 to 1980]

Director

University of Mississippi [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1974 to 1999]

Law Professor

Shelby County Government [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1980 to 2002]

Public Defender

Wharton Law Firm [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1980 to 2002]

Shelby County Government [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 200209 to 200910]

Mayor

NAACP [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

American Bar Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

National Bar Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Tennessee Bar Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

American College of Trial Lawyers [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Alpha Phi Fraternal [MEMBEROf]
[from 1963 to ?]

Member

Sigma Pi Phi [MEMBEROf]
[from 1988 to ?]

