

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bishop William L. Sheals

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sheals, William L., 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bishop William L. Sheals,
Dates:	March 13, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:18).
Abstract:	City government official and pastor Bishop William L. Sheals (1947 -) was the director of the Hopewell Baptist Church in Norcross, Georgia and the winner of the 1999 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major Award for Community Service. Sheals was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 13, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_026
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Teacher, preacher and evangelist, Dr. William L. Sheals has been the Senior Pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church in Norcross, Georgia since 1980. He received a business degree from New York University and holds theological degrees from Florida Memorial Seminary and International Bible College.

Sheals' experience in the business world includes acting as the former Vice President of the Mortgage Department of Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association in Harlem, New York. Subsequently, he managed the branch office of

Beneficial Financial Company in the Bronx and worked as a disc jockey, a concert promoter and an actor and director off-Broadway. In Florida, he served as the Assistant Director of the Lakeland Housing Authority while pursuing his advanced studies there. He moved to Atlanta in 1979 to work as the Assistant Director of the Atlanta Housing Authority, but left the position after ten years to devote himself entirely to the rapidly-growing Hopewell Baptist Church, which was founded by former slaves after the Civil War.

Under Sheals' direction since 1980, Hopewell has grown from a two-acre, one-building facility with 200 members to a thirty-acre campus called "The City of Hope," with a membership of nearly 17,000, including over 60 ministries and auxiliaries. The City of Hope includes a senior citizens facility, a 500-member youth church, a child development center, a Christian Academy that teaches pre-school through eighth grade and a Bible College.

Sheals' leadership and civic service has been honored with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major Award for Community Service (1999) the Civic Leader of the Year Award, Gwinnet County (1995) the African American Community Service Award (1994) the Outstanding Humanitarian Award, National Kidney Foundation (1988) and the Presidential "Special Citizen" Award for acting as Director of "Ministries Against Drugs" (1989). He is the founding President of the North Metro 100 Black Men and member of the United Way Special Committee, the Rotary Club, the Human Relations Commission and the Mayor's Advisory Council.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bishop William L. Sheals was conducted by Samuel Adams on March 13, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. City government official and pastor Bishop William L. Sheals (1947 -) was the director of the Hopewell Baptist Church in Norcross, Georgia and the winner of the 1999 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major Award for Community Service.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

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:

Sheals, William L., 1947-

Adams, Samuel (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Sheals, William L., 1947---Interviews

African American Baptists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Atlanta Housing Authority

Occupations:

City Government Official

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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 Bishop William L. Sheals, March 13, 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 2/5/2020 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 Bishop William L. Sheals, Section A2002_026_001_001, TRT: 0:30:19 2002/03/13

William Sheals describes his family background. Sheals was born to James and Elma Sheals in Lakeland, Florida on January 15, 1947. James Sheals was a citrus fruits contractor, and Elma Sheals was a cleaning woman at a local hospital. William Sheals was a young entrepreneur who delivered groceries and ran an in-home “movie theater” to make extra money. As a youth, Sheals enjoyed playing on his high school football team, and was a recurring star in his high school plays. Though Sheals’ childhood community of Lakeland, Florida, did not experience the racial tensions typical of the Jim Crow south, he recalls direct instances of discrimination involving his parents. In addition, the black church played a central role in the community. After graduating from high school in 1965, Sheals attended a local junior college until he was drafted to serve in the military in 1967.

African American Baptists--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop William L. Sheals, Section A2002_026_001_002, TRT: 0:30:54 2002/03/13

In 1967, William Sheals was drafted to serve in the military. After fulfilling his commitment, he moved to New York City, New York, and eventually worked as a branch manager for Beneficial Finance Company while attending New York City College. He also performed in a number of off-Broadway plays and as a movie extra. Around 1969, Sheals was hired as departmental vice president of Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association in Harlem. He also opened a record store in the Bronx in 1970. Upon the death of his father in the early 1970s, Sheals moved to Florida, opened another record store, and worked as a radio disc jockey. He became the number one radio disc jockey in Central Florida and also found success as a concert promoter. In 1975, Sheals received a life-changing vision calling him to minister. Soon thereafter, he ended his career as a disc jockey and accepted a position as the Deputy Director of the Lakeland Housing Authority. In 1977, Sheals acknowledged his call to minister and preached his first sermon.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop William L. Sheals, Section A2002_026_001_003, TRT: 0:31:02 2002/03/13

In 1979, William Sheals was hired as an area manager for the Atlanta Housing Authority; eight months later he was promoted to Assistant Director. In 1980, he was called to pastor Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church in Norcross, Georgia. At the time, the 200-member church held services only twice monthly. Within a decade, membership swelled to 1,500 members, and services were held four times each Sunday. Sheals received a vision to build a multi-acre campus on the fifteen acres of junkyard property located behind the church. The property manager provided the church with five acres of the property financed at \$1 million. The property was dubbed “The City of Hope,” and a new sanctuary was dedicated in 1993. The church acquired the remaining ten acres of property. The “City of Hope” campus boasts programs and services including a restaurant, a beauty and barber shop, a Christian Academy grade and high school, a gymnasium, a child development center, and an economic development center called the Christianomics Mall.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop William L. Sheals, Section

A2002_026_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28 2002/03/13

William Sheals organized the Concerned Black Men of North Metro in 1989, and the organization was later chartered as the 100 Black Men of North Metro Atlanta in 1992. Sheals served as the organization's President from 1992 to 1997. Sheals describes the ways in which Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church serves Metro Atlanta, particularly through its youth mentorship and economic empowerment programs. Sheals authored a three-book Christian educational series entitled '...the Spirit Filled Life,' as well 'Pastor Help! My Marriage is in Trouble,' a marriage counseling book. He describes what motivated him to write these books, as well as some of the themes in 'Pastor Help!' Sheals shares his plans for the future of Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, which include a scholarship fund and a job training/job placement center. William Sheals describes his church's annual reenactment of the Upper Room scene, as well as the sights, sounds, and tastes of his childhood. He closes by sharing a message for the youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop William L. Sheals, Section
A2002_026_001_005, TRT: 0:28:35 2002/03/13

William Sheals talks about the challenges and advantages mega-churches face, and comments on the concept of "Black Theology." He also describes the evolution of "Black Christianity." William Sheals reflects upon his legacy, and closes the interview by narrating his photographs.