

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Mason, Gilbert R.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr.,
Dates:	November 11, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:41).
Abstract:	Community activist and family practitioner Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. (1928 - 2006) worked as a physician in Mississippi for over forty years, and led a nonviolent protest against the “whites only” section of a federally maintained Gulf Coast beach, which resulted in a successful and historic first federal anti-discrimination lawsuit against the state of Mississippi. Mason and local activists also won the first school desegregation lawsuit in the history of Mississippi. Mason was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 11, 2002, in Biloxi, Mississippi. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_202
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., “wade-in” activist and physician, was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on October 7, 1928. When he graduated from Jackson’s Lanier High School in 1945, Mason dreamed of becoming a doctor. He earned a B.S. degree from Tennessee State University in 1949. He earned an M.D. degree from Howard University Medical School in 1954 and served a year as an intern at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri.

Mason started a family practice in Biloxi, Mississippi, in 1955. In May 1959, he led a nonviolent protest against the “whites only” section of a federally funded Gulf Coast beach. Mason’s group was arrested. Subsequent “wade-ins” ignited some of the bloodiest white rioting in Mississippi history. These resulted in a successful antidiscrimination lawsuit against the state of Mississippi, the first such case filed in U.S. history. At the same time, Mason filed the first school desegregation lawsuit in the history of Biloxi, which he also won. Mason collaborated with other Mississippi NAACP activists, including Winston Hudson, Amzie Moore, Aaron Henry and Medgar Evers. He helped the NAACP join with CORE, SNCC and SCLC to form the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Mason played a role in COFO’s massive black voter registration drive, the Freedom Summer of 1964. Mason served as president of the Mississippi NAACP for thirty-three years.

The recipient of numerous awards as a physician, Mason was recognized with a special commendation by joint resolution of the Mississippi State Legislature on March 1, 2002 for his contributions to the Biloxi Regional Medical Center. He resided in Biloxi where he was known as “the civil rights doctor” until his death on July 8, 2006.

On Sunday, July 30, 2006, the mayor of Biloxi, Mississippi proclaimed it to be Dr. Gilbert Mason Day in Biloxi.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 11, 2002, in Biloxi, Mississippi, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community activist and family practitioner Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. (1928 - 2006) worked as a physician in Mississippi for over forty years, and led a nonviolent protest against the “whites only” section of a federally maintained Gulf Coast beach, which resulted in a successful and historic first federal anti-discrimination lawsuit against the state of Mississippi. Mason and local activists also won the first school desegregation lawsuit in the history of Mississippi.

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:

Mason, Gilbert R.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Mason, Gilbert R.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Consumer 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 Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., November 11, 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 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 Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., Section A2002_202_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. describes his family background. His father, Willie Atwood Mason, was born to Walter Harrison Mason, a farmer, and Effie Charlotte. Walter Harrison Mason's mother, Suzanna Mason, was born to slaves

Harrison Mason and Chaney Giles. Harrison Mason purchased his own land after Emancipation, and farmed until his death in 1890. Dr. Mason's mother, Eileen Jackson Mason, was born in Yazoo County, Mississippi to farmers Mary Williams and Kelvin Augustus Jackson II. Mary Williams' mother, Elizabeth, was born to a slave from Madagascar named Paralee. Kelvin August Jackson II's father, Kelvin Augustus Jackson I, was born to Confederate Brigadier General William Wirt Adams and a slave named Eliza. Eileen Jackson and Willie Atwood Mason met and married in Hines County, Mississippi, and later moved to Jackson, Mississippi. They gave birth to Gilbert Mason on October 7, 1928. Dr. Mason describes the sights, smells, and sounds of his childhood, as well as his childhood interests and activities.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., Section A2002_202_001_002, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

As child in Jackson, Mississippi, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., enjoyed playing in the hayfields and stargazing. Mason also joined his local Boy Scout troupe in 1940. In 1943, Mason and his friend Joe became Jackson, Mississippi's first black Eagle Scouts, and the third and fourth black Eagle Scouts in the state. Mason excelled as a grade school student, and began playing basketball in the seventh grade at Jim Hill High School. Around 1942, he transferred to Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi. Here, his classmates included HistoryMaker Lerone Bennett, who played on the school football team with Mason. In addition, Bennett was the editor and chief of the "Maroon and White," the school's newspaper, while Mason handled the calligraphy for the paper. Dr. Mason skipped his eleventh grade year to serve as a Boy Scout camp director. He graduated from Lanier High School in 1945, and enrolled at Tennessee State University with the help of his accounting teacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., Section A2002_202_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. enrolled at Tennessee State University in 1945, and then applied to Howard University's Colleges of Medicine and Dentistry, as well as Meharry Medical College. He was accepted to all three, and elected to attend Howard University College of Medicine upon graduating from Tennessee State University in 1949. Mason married and had his son, Gilbert R. Mason, Jr. while in medical school, and graduated at the top of his class in 1954. He took an internship at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, then moved to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1955 and worked at New Biloxi Hospital before opening his own practice. He then joined the Gulf Port branch of the NAACP in 1955, and worked to petition for desegregating Biloxi's public schools in 1959. In 1959, Dr. Mason formed the Gulf Coast Civic Action Committee, who led a "wade in" on Mississippi's Gulf Coast Beach in 1960, which was met with bloody retaliation from whites.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., Section A2002_202_001_004, TRT: 0:28:25 ?

In 1963, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason founded the Biloxi Chapter of the NAACP, and led another "wade-in" on the Gulf Coast Beach. Mason, the Gulf Coast Civic Action Committee, the Gulf Port NAACP, and the Biloxi NAACP worked collectively from 1960 to 1969 to legally desegregate Mississippi's beaches, which led to a 1969 Mississippi State Supreme Court decision of desegregation. Mason continued to work toward the integration of Biloxi's public schools, and led the Biloxi NAACP to integrate movie theaters, restaurants, and hotels in Biloxi. Mason also pressured the City of Biloxi to hire blacks on the police force, in the sheriff's department, and in city hall. In 1963, Mason helped form

the Council of Federated Organizations. He also served as Parliamentarian of the Freedom Democratic Party from 1962 to 1974, and as President of the Mississippi NAACP for thirty-three years. He consulted with President Lyndon B. Johnson to develop The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr., Section A2002_202_001_005, TRT: 0:27:11 ?

Upon moving to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1955, Dr. Gilbert R. Mason began working at Howard Memorial Hospital (or New Memorial Hospital), where a white man purposefully spilled hot coffee on him in the segregated cafeteria. In the mid-1950s, Mason filed a school desegregation lawsuit against the City of Biloxi, and won. In 1970, Mason became the first African American member of the American Academy of Family Practice after having two white members vouch for him. That same year, he became one of the first African American members of the American Board of Family Physicians. In 1970, Governor John Bell Williams appointed Dr. Mason to the Mississippi State Licensure Board, where he served until 1980. Mason shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community, talks about his family and retirement, and then closes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy, how he would like to be remembered, and narrating his photographs.