

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend James Bevel

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Bevel, James L. (James Luther), 1936-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 14, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and minister Reverend James Bevel (1936 - 2008 ) was the daring hero of 1963's Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama. In addition to his activities during the Civil Rights Movement, Bevel were also an active force in interfaith dialogues, and several human and civil rights campaigns in the United States. Bevel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 14, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_004
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist Reverend James Luther Bevel was born in Itta Bena, Mississippi, on October 19, 1936. After a stint in the services, Bevel was called to the ministry and enrolled in the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. While in the Seminary, Bevel joined the Nashville chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), then led by the Reverend James Lawson.

In 1960, Bevel and other black students trained by Lawson, including John Lewis, Dianne Nash, Marion Barry, and Bernard Lafayette, organized sit-ins against segregated lunch counters. Eventually Bevel and his colleagues won a hard-fought, nonviolent victory; soon after, as chairman of the Nashville student movement, Bevel participated in Freedom Rides to desegregate interstate travel and public accommodations throughout the South. In his home state, Bevel created the SCLC Mississippi Project for voting rights in 1962. In 1963, Bevel was compelled to join the desegregation struggle being waged by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Alabama. When King was jailed, Bevel organized black children and marched against Commissioner Bull Connor's fire hoses and police dogs. The "Children's Crusade," as the movement led by Bevel came to be known, turned the media tide in the favor of the desegregationists. Bevel helped in the brainstorming for the March on Washington in 1963, and the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965. Bevel also worked behind the scenes on the Chicago open housing movement in 1966; the anti-Vietnam War movement in 1967; the Memphis sanitation workers strike; and the Poor People's Campaign in 1968.

In 1969, Bevel left SCLC and created the Making of a Man Clinic in 1970. In the 1980s and 1990s, Bevel founded Students for Education and Economic Development (SEED). In 1992, Bevel ran for vice president on a ticket with Lyndon LaRouche.

Bevel served as pastor of the Hebraic-Christian-Islamic Assembly in Chicago; a board member of Chicago's Fulfilling Our Responsibilities Unto Mankind (F.O.R.U.M.); and chairman of the Camden, New Jersey, County Economic Development Board. Bevel also served as pastor and adviser to Chicago's Council of Mothers; the West Side Baptist Minister's Conference; WorkShip Coalition; and the Nation of Islam.

Bevel passed away on December 19, 2008 at age 72.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend James Bevel was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 14, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and minister Reverend James Bevel (1936 - 2008 ) was the daring hero of 1963's Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama. In addition to his activities during the Civil Rights Movement, Bevel were also an active force in interfaith dialogues, and several

human and civil rights campaigns in the United States.

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## **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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Bevel, James L. (James Luther), 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Bevel, James L. (James Luther), 1936- --Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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African American civil rights workers--Interviews

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Community activists--Interviews

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African American clergy--Interviews

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African American religious leaders--Interviews

---

African American Baptists--Interviews

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African Americans--Genealogy

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African American families--Mississippi

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Cleveland (Ohio)

---

African American children

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Childhood

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Religious thought--United States

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United States. Navy

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Segregation in education--United States

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Nashville (Tenn.)

---

Civil rights movements--United States

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Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)

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Freedom Rides, 1961

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Council of Federated Organizations (U.S.)

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Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963

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Assassination

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Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama

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Poor People's Campaign

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Anti-war demonstrations

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Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965 : Selma, Ala.)

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March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., 1963

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African American political activists--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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## **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 Reverend James Bevel, January 14, 2003. 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).

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## **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.

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## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel, Section  
A2003\_004\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:35 2003/01/14

Minister and activist James Bevel discusses his family's ethnic origins, sharing his family's unique philosophy regarding ancestry and genealogy. Bevel then describes his parents, crediting both for influencing his religion, education, and philosophy. Bevel also describes his hometown of Itta Bena, Mississippi, a segregated rural town.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

Community activists--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American religious leaders--Interviews.

African American Baptists--Interviews.

African Americans--Genealogy.

African American families--Mississippi.

Cleveland (Ohio).

African American children.

Religious thought--United States.

United States. Navy.

Segregation in education--United States.

Nashville (Tenn.).

Civil rights movements--United States.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.).

Freedom Rides, 1961.

Council of Federated Organizations (U.S.).

Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963.

Assassination.

Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama.

Poor People's Campaign.

Anti-war demonstrations.

Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965 : Selma, Ala.).

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington,

D.C., 1963.

African American political activists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel, Section  
A2003\_004\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2003/01/14

James Bevel continues to describe his childhood environment in Itta Bena, Mississippi. Topics include his schooling, his recreations, and the social climate of the town. Bevel then explains how he moved to Cleveland, Ohio, with his mother, and describes his education there. Bevel then discusses his decision to enlist in the Navy, explains how his changing philosophy caused him to leave early.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel, Section  
A2003\_004\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/01/14

James Bevel briefly discusses his activities before joining the ministry, including why he left the U.S. Navy and his musical career. Bevel then explains why he chose to enroll at the American Baptist Theological Seminary, and describes the lessons he learned there. Bevel describes the organization and strategies of the student-led movement for civil rights in Nashville, which came into being while he was attending seminary.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel, Section  
A2003\_004\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:00 2003/01/14

James Bevel details his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Bevel begins his discussion in Nashville, where he helped to desegregate department stores and movie theaters, and was a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Bevel then speaks of his participation in the Freedom Rides in Alabama and Mississippi, and explains the philosophy behind his and SNCC's actions.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend James Bevel, Section  
A2003\_004\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:10 2003/01/14

James Bevel details his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. Bevel discusses further his participation in SNCC, and explains why he supported the creation of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), the goal of which was to promote voting rights



in the South. Bevel also talks about the assassination of Medgar Evers, and the challenges he and SNCC faced when bringing their battle into a national political arena.