

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Barrett, T. L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr.,
Dates:	March 25, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:03:56).
Abstract:	Radio host and pastor Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr. (1944 -) was co-convener of the American Clergy Leadership Conference, and an outspoken advocate of family values. He was also a regional coordinator for the Million Family March on Washington, D.C. in 2000. Barrett was pastor of the Life Church of God in Christ in Chicago, and had a radio presence since the late 60s. Barrett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 25, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_054
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pastor, musician, and motivational speaker the Reverend Thomas Lee (T. L.) Barrett was born January 13, 1944, in Jamaica, Long Island, New York. His father, from the Mississippi Delta, was a part-time gospel performer with the Southern Wonders. At the age of nine, Barrett's family moved to Chicago, Illinois, and Barrett continued to struggle in school. After his father passed away, Barrett returned to New York and found work in a hospital removing brains from cadavers at the age of sixteen.

By that year, Barrett's musical talents were being noticed, especially his ability on the piano. He began performing at the Waldorf Astoria and the New York City Village Gate, as well as in several church choirs. He gave up his job in the hospital, and in addition to his music, worked as an executive shoeshine man. Feeling the call to the ministry, Barrett attended Bethel Bible College and passed the New York State Board of Regents ministerial exam. After marrying a young woman from New York, Barrett returned to Chicago in 1967. The following year, he was named the pastor of Life Center Church of God in Christ, and in 1968 he began purchasing airtime on local radio stations to spread his ministry. By 1973, he was a regular on WBMX, and he remained on-air there until switching to WJPC in 1980.

Barrett has been active in a number of causes, including the Million Man March in Washington, D.C., in 1995. During that event, he brought busloads of men from Chicago to the nation's capital. He was also one of the regional coordinators for the Million Family March in 2000. He has worked with other Chicago-area pastors and gangs to explore ways in which gangs could prevent crime in troubled urban areas. A strong believer in family values, Barrett was a supporter of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon and the Catholic Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, who took a wife and was ostracized by the Catholic Church. Barrett has also recorded five albums and several sessions of taped sermons.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 25, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio host and pastor Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr. (1944 -) was co-convener of the American Clergy Leadership Conference, and an outspoken advocate of family values. He was also a regional coordinator for the Million Family March on Washington, D.C. in 2000. Barrett was pastor of the Life Church of God in Christ in Chicago, and had a radio presence since the late 60s.

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:

Barrett, T. L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Barrett, T. L.--Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

Radio talk show hosts--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Host

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., March 25, 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 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 Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_001, TRT: 0:30:36 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett was born on January 13, 1944 in Jamaica, Long Island, New York to Addie May Burns Barrett and Thomas Lee Barrett, Sr. Both of his parents were born near Itta Bena, Mississippi, and moved to New York when Barrett's maternal grandfather, Addie Burns, moved his family in the late 1930s or early 1940s, after his parents had gotten engaged. Thomas Lee Barrett, Sr. worked selling scrap metal and as a musician, and he formed the musical groups "The Southern Wonders" and "The Barret Singers." His father's cousin was Reverend C.L. Franklin. Barrett and his family moved to Chicago, Illinois when he was nine years old and lived first on the West Side and later on the South Side in the Ida B. Wells Homes. In Chicago, Barrett's mother worked as a domestic and his father worked for Rathborne, Hair and Ridgeway Company. Both of them instilled a strong sense of morals and hard work into Barrett and his siblings.

African American clergy--Interviews.

Radio talk show hosts--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_002, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett grew up on the West Side of Chicago and later in the Ida B. Wells Homes on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. He describes the Ida B. Wells Homes as nice when his family first moved in, but they quickly deteriorated. Barrett reflects on the presence of gangs in Ida B. Wells, including gang member John Crawford who later became a Reverend. His family was forced to leave Ida B. Wells after his brother was hired by Jewel Grocery Stores and his family moved into the storefront where his father preached. In Chicago, Barrett attended Medill Elementary School, John Milton Gregory Math and Science Academy, and Wendell Phillips High School and was kicked out of all of them for being disobedient. A teacher at Wendell Phillips left a lasting impression on Barrett's life when she told him that he would never amount to anything. After Barrett's father's death on October 17, 1960, Barrett moved to New York, where he got his GED and became a morgue assistant at Flushing Hospital Medical Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_003, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett worked as a morgue assistant at Flushing Hospital in New York City starting in 1960, where his role was helping to remove brains and pituitary glands after autopsies were performed by the doctors. At the same time, Barrett worked for Maclean's Cleaning Service as a custodial worker at the Polytechnic Institute (now the New York University Polytechnic School of Engineering). Barrett also began working for his cousin's show shine business, which he left when he started his own business with the help of Percy and Julian Uris and Percy Uris' son-in-law. After playing piano for a party, Barrett was offered the opportunity to study piano under the acclaimed teacher Irwin Stahl; however, Barrett decided to become a preacher instead of a pianist after a drive home from one of his lessons in 1965. In 1967, Barrett and his wife moved to Chicago, Illinois, where he preached at Mount Zion Baptist Church and founded the Life Center Church of God in Christ.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_004, TRT:

0:30:03 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett describes the times he was miraculously healed through positive thinking, including how his vision improved and how he recovered from an incurable blood disease at Mary Thompson Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. He met his wife, Cleopatra Barrett, at a church in New Rochelle, New York, where he was invited to preach and play music. After a controversy with the pastor of that church, Barrett and his wife eloped and moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1967. After Barrett was invited to preach at a Baptist church, he gained popularity with the congregation and was able to found his own church, the Life Center Church of God in Christ in 1968. It remained a Baptist church until 1974, when it re-affiliated with the Church of God in Christ. In 1973, Barrett began his career in radio as a gospel host at WBMX and began his friendship with HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Johnnie Colemon.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_005, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett describes his theology and how it differs from mainline Christianity. He believes in self-improvement and positive thinking and disagrees with preachers who dwell on the power of the devil or original sin. Barrett shares his belief that God is within everything in the universe rather than showcasing God as an anthropomorphic being. His message of positive thinking serves as a method for regaining mastery over the mindset of slave thinking. He also believes that positive thinking will reduce violence and drug use. His Life Center Church of God in Christ teaches children to think positively and avoid letting the world take advantage of them.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend T. L. Barrett, Jr., Section A2003_054_001_006, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Reverend T.L. Barrett shares his theology about why bad things happen to good people, and talks about positive thinking and its ability to prevent bad things from happening. Barrett describes what would happen if more people focused on positive thoughts and energy. Barrett shares his views on fundamentalist Christianity, including his disregard of Satan, not fearing God, and some parts of the Bible. Barrett ends the interview by describing the relationship between his theology and the Civil Rights Movement, including his involvement with Operation PUSH. He reflects on how his ministry with Sun Myung Moon reunited him with his wife.