

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian

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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>	Vivian, C. T.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 7, 2004 and October 5, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004 and 2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:20:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights leader and minister Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian (1924 - 2020) was a close friend and lieutenant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was an active member of both SNCC and the SCLC, participated in the Freedom Rides, and founded the Black Action Strategies and Information Center. Vivian was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 7, 2004 and October 5, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia and Selma, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_020
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend C. T. Vivian was born Cordy Tindell Vivian on July 30, 1924 in Howard County, Missouri. As a small boy he migrated with his mother to Macomb, Illinois, where he attended Lincoln Grade School and Edison Junior High School. Vivian graduated from Macomb High School in 1942 and went on to attend Western Illinois University in Macomb, where he worked as the sports editor for the school newspaper.

His first professional job was recreation director for the Carver Community Center in Peoria, Illinois. There, Vivian participated in his first sit-in demonstrations, which successfully integrated Barton's Cafeteria in 1947. Studying for the ministry at American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee in 1959, Vivian met Rev. James Lawson, who was teaching Mahatma Ghandhi's nonviolent direct action strategy to the Student Central Committee. Diane Nash, Bernard Lafayette, James Bevel, James Forman, John Lewis and other students from American Baptist, Fisk University and Tennessee State University executed a systematic non-violent campaign for justice. On April 19, 1960, 4,000 demonstrators marched on City Hall where Vivian and Diane Nash challenged Nashville Mayor Ben West. As a result, Mayor West publicly agreed that racial discrimination was morally wrong. Many of those students became part of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1961, Vivian, now a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) participated in Freedom Rides replacing injured members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Vivian was appointed to the executive staff of the SCLC in 1963, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., named him national director of affiliates. Two years later, in an incident that would make national news, Vivian confronted Sheriff Jim Clark on the steps of the Selma courthouse during a voter registration drive. After an impassioned speech by Vivian, Clark struck him on the mouth, portraying Clark to the world as a racist. In 1969, Vivian wrote the first book on the modern-day Civil Rights Movement, entitled *Black Power and the American Myth*. During these years, he also started a program entitled Vision, sending students from Alabama to college; the program later came to be known as Upward Bound. By 1979, Vivian had organized and was serving as chairman of the board of the National Anti-Klan Network, which is known today as

the Center for Democratic Renewal.

Vivian is also the founder of the Black Action Strategies and Information Center (BASIC), a workplace consultancy on race relations and multicultural training. In 1999, Vivian turned the leadership of BASIC over to one of his sons. Vivian recently launched a new organization (Churches Supporting Churches) in response to the help needed for the victims and churches affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Vivian was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 7, 2004.

Vivian passed away on July 17, 2020.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 7, 2004 and October 5, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia and Selma, Alabama, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights leader and minister Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian (1924 - 2020) was a close friend and lieutenant of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was an active member of both SNCC and the SCLC, participated in the Freedom Rides, and founded the Black Action Strategies and Information Center.

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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:

Vivian, C. T.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Vivian, C. T.--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews

African American clergy--Alabama--Interviews

Macomb (Ill.)--Social life and customs

Depressions--1929--United States

African American families--Middle West

Western Illinois University

Nonviolence

Equality--United States

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968

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

Williams, Hosea, 1926-

Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1911-

African Americans--Civil rights--Alabama--Selma--History--20th century

Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama--Selma

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Baptists.

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**Occupations:**

Civil Rights Leader

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Minister

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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 Dr. C.T. Vivian, March 7, 2004 and October 5, 2016. 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).

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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 Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Civil rights leader and educator C.T. Vivian begins by detailing his mother's background and personality. He discusses his ancestry, noting that he comes

from a family of educators. Vivian then details his childhood and family life during the Depression, vividly describing his hometown of Macomb, Illinois. African American civic leaders--Interviews. African American clergy--Alabama--Interviews. Macomb (Ill.)--Social life and customs. Depressions--1929--United States. African American families--Middle West. Western Illinois University. Nonviolence. Equality--United States. Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968. Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965 : Selma, Ala.). Williams, Hosea, 1926-. Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1911-. African Americans--Civil rights--Alabama--Selma--History--20th century. Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama--Selma.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Civil rights leader and educator C.T. Vivian continues to detail his childhood in Macomb, Illinois, during the Depression, focusing on his early education and noting the influence of Western Illinois University. He then shares several anecdotes from his childhood, illustrating race relations and his participation in church. Vivian also shares a story about his early commitment to nonviolence.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Civil rights leader and educator C.T. Vivian explains how his social life during his high school years in Macomb, Illinois, began to awaken his awareness of social inequality. After outlining his early career aspirations, Vivian describes his college years at Western Illinois University, where he studied literature and social sciences. He then discusses his early career after graduating from college and before being called to the ministry.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Civil rights leader and educator C.T. Vivian recounts the powerful call to enter the ministry and the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and talks about his collaborations with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Vivian then describes in great detail the events leading up to the fateful Civil Rights march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama, and his involvement in the march itself. Vivian also outlines the contributions of Hosea Williams and Amelia Boynton Robinson.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Civil rights leader and educator C.T. Vivian vividly recalls the events in Selma, Alabama, that later became known as "Bloody Sunday," and details Dr. Martin Luther Kings, Jr.'s second attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. He also recounts the day Sheriff Jim Clark attacked him on Selma's courthouse steps, as well as his subsequent arrest.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_006, TRT: 6:27:30 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian served as the vice president of the Peoria NAACP in Peoria, Illinois. In the 1940s, the branch president, Harry Sephus, advocated for the integration of the Caterpillar Tractor Company. Around this time, Vivian's wife, Octavia Vivian, participated in nonviolent demonstrations in Pontiac, Michigan, where the city's first black-owned newspaper, the Pontiac Challenger, was founded in 1944. Vivian went on to serve as a civil rights leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, along with Andrew Young and Reverend James Bevel, in the 1960s. In this capacity, Vivian challenged the segregationist activities of Sheriff Jim Clark. Vivian was attacked by Clark while leading a group of protesters to register vote at the Dallas County Courthouse in Selma, Alabama. Vivian was then taken to the Dallas County jail, where he was hit with the jailer's billy club as he was being taken to his cell.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_007, TRT: 7:26:10 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian first met Reverend James Bevel when they were students at the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. They both went on to become leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the Civil Rights Movement. Vivian was jailed for confronting Sheriff Jim Clark on the steps of the Dallas County Courthouse in Selma, Alabama. Vivian's case was then dismissed as a result of the NAACP attorney Fred Gray's successful litigation. Under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Vivian was involved in the planning of the Selma to Montgomery March. Prior to the march, Vivian was asked to organize the congregation of the Zion United Methodist Church in Marion, Alabama. Soon after the service ended, local policemen started attacking the parishioners; and activist Jimmie Lee Jackson was fatally shot. Following Jackson's funeral service, the SCLC went forward with its planning of the march.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_008, TRT: 8:29:27 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian served as a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) under the direction of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Following the murder of the activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, the SCLC gathered at the Alabama State House in Montgomery, Alabama, where Dr. King delivered his How Long, Not Long speech. Soon after the Selma to Montgomery March, Vivian created the Vision educational program to provide college scholarships to over seven hundred Alabama students. Vision eventually became the federally funded Upward Bound program under President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration in 1965. At this point in the interview, Vivian recalls Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's decision to become a minister; and the arrest of Sheriff Jim Clark. He also talks about the Black Lives Matter movement; and the effectiveness of nonviolent activism, including the activities of the Concerned Student 1950 group at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_009, TRT: 9:21:13 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian graduated from Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois in 1946. While working at a community center in Peoria, Illinois, Vivian was recruited to help establish the new YMCA in Chicago, Illinois. Vivian then joined the Civil Rights Movement as a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under the direction of Reverend Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Around this time, Vivian grew motivated to expand his ministry beyond the South. He started working with Chicago's Urban Training Center for Christian Mission, which was one of twenty-two centers created under the auspices of the Episcopal church to address the needs and concerns of urban dwellers. Through the center, Vivian helped bring students from Payne Theological Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio to Chicago for ministerial training. Vivian also remembers Dr. King's assassination in 1968; and he talks about the reformation of the National Council of Churches.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_010, TRT: 10:34:04 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian was a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Alabama in the 1960s. Unhappy with the Nashville Globe's coverage of racial issues, Vivian created the Nashville News Star in Nashville, Tennessee. Vivian eventually joined the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission under the leadership of James Morton in Chicago, Illinois. There, Vivian helped recruit African American ministers to the center. He also interacted with well-known Chicago ministers like Reverend Dr. Kwame John R. Porter, Reverend Wilbur Nathan Daniel and Bishop Arthur Brazier. Vivian and J. Archie Hargraves co-founded the Coalition for United Community Action, which protested the unjust business practices of the Red Rooster, Inc. Vivian then became the founding director of the Seminary Without Walls at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. His first book, 'Black Power and the American Myth,' was published by the Philadelphia-based Fortress Press in 1970.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian, Section A2004\_020\_002\_011, TRT: 11:31:31 ?

Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian worked as a director of the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission in Chicago, Illinois in the 1960s. Around this time, the center also produced audiotapes of well-known ministers that were sold at the gatherings of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. In 1974, Vivian traveled with a group to Kenya, where he was given a tour by Jomo Kenyatta of the country's agricultural spaces. Vivian went on to co-found the National Anti-Klan Network in 1979. Five years later, Vivian joined the presidential campaign staff of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson. Vivian talks about his admiration of Reverend Gardner Taylor. He reflects upon the presidency of Barack Obama; and his own tenure as the chairman of Capitol City Bank and Trust Company in Atlanta, Georgia. Vivian concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.