

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Michael A. Battle

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Battle, Michael A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle,
Dates:	March 22, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:15:15).
Abstract:	College president and theologian The Honorable Michael A. Battle (1950 -) was the seventh president of Interdenominational Theological Center and was an administrator at Hampton University, Virginia State University and Chicago State University. Battle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 22, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_032
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. Michael A. Battle, the seventh president of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), was born on July 28, 1950, in St. Louis, Missouri. He earned his B.A. degree from Trinity College, the master of divinity degree from Duke University and the doctor of ministry from Howard University. Other academic achievements include certifications from the Institute of Educational Management at Harvard University, the Executive Leadership Institute of Hampton University, and American Association of State Colleges and

Universities' Millennium Leadership.

Before assuming the presidency of ITC, Battle was vice president of student affairs at Chicago State University. From 1996 to 1998, Dr. battle served as associate vice president of student affairs at Virginia State University, where, under his leadership, the institution's successful planning and assessment was widely acknowledged. From 1976 to 1996, Battle served as dean of the University Chapel at Hampton University, pastor to the Hampton University Memorial Church and executive secretary and treasurer of the Hampton University Ministers' Conference, the nation's largest interdenominational conference among African American clergy. His active participation in the conference helped increase the number of members, which successfully raised significant amounts of money toward the construction of the university's convocation center. Dr. Battle was also a teacher of philosophy and religion, and served for twenty years as a Chaplain in the United States Army Reserve.

Other notable achievements include serving as vice president of the American Committee on Africa from 1994 to 1998, as well as participating as an election observer for the first free election in South Africa. Awards and honors given to Battle include: the Leadership Award from the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals; the Martin Luther King Memorial Speakers Award from Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity; the Echoes of Excellence Award for Community Service; the National Conference of Christians and Jews Humanitarian Award; and was a Rockefeller Fund for the Theological Education Scholar from 1973 to 1976. Dr. Battle has also authored numerous books and publications on topics related to ecumenism and the Black church.

Battle is married to the former Linda Ann McClure, and is the father of three children: Michael Jr., Lisa Angela and Martin Luther. Michael is a graduate of Malcolm X College in Chicago, Lisa is a graduate of Elizabeth City State University and Central Michigan State University and is also a captain in the U.S. Army; and Martin is completing his undergraduate work in religious studies at Hampton University.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle was conducted by Jodi Merriday on March 22, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. College president and theologian The Honorable Michael A. Battle (1950 -) was the seventh president of

Interdenominational Theological Center and was an administrator at Hampton University, Virginia State University and Chicago State University.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

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

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Battle, Michael A.

Merriday, Jodi (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Battle, Michael A.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta, Ga.)

Occupations:

Theologian

College President

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers|EducationMakers

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 The Honorable

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 The Honorable Michael A. Battle, Section A2004_032_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 2004/03/22

Interdenominational Theological Center president Michael A. Battle describes his family background, sharing stories passed down from slavery. He explains how an encounter with the Ku Klux Klan forced his family to move from Mississippi to St. Louis, Missouri. Battle describes his own childhood growing up in St. Louis in the 1950s, including his struggling with a heart disorder, patronizing local black-owned businesses in the neighborhood, and comparing his upbringing with that of his parents.

1. Michael Battle was born on July 28, 1950 in St. Louis, Missouri. 2. Today, he is the president to the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, GA. It has 6 different denominational seminaries. 3. Michael's favorite foods are salmon, fricassee chicken, and key line pie. His favorite time of the year is autumn, and his favorite color is blue. His favorite vacation

destination is Gambia and Senegal in Africa. 4. Michael's father was named Jesse Battle. He was born in Bothwell, Mississippi. His mother is named Mary Anne Battle. She was born in Minter City, Mississippi. They met at Michael's grandfather's church in Grenada, Mississippi. 5. Jesse and Mary Anne's union produced 11 children. Michael names all ten of his siblings. 6. Michael can trace as far back as four generations because in each generation there was always at least 2 sons who became ministers. Michael's father was a bishop in the Midwestern District Council of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. His grandfather, great grandfather, and great great grandfather were all ministers. 7. Michael speaks about the ethnicity of his ancestors. He says there's some Irish way back in his background, but his family maintains that they are 100% African American (despite his light complexion). 8. Michael has a picture of his great uncle (his grandfather's older brother). Their father was a slave, and after slavery, he became a sharecropper. His great uncle had a lot of horrible stories about his family during and after slavery. 9. Most of the stories had to do with family members' wives who were forced to have relationships with slave owners and the plantation owners where they were sharecroppers. 10. Michael also tells the story of why his father had to leave Mississippi. A white man called his wife a liar, and he went to the man's house that night and called him out. The KKK was going to lynch Michael's father, but the members of his father's church (Michael's grandfather) hid the family and smuggled them from church members' house to house until they reached the Mississippi border. Michael says it was similar to the Underground Railroad. 11. Michael's earliest memory is having a heart attack at the age of 4. He was born with a hole between his left and right ventricle of the heart. He remembers lying on a palette on the floor, and everybody being sad. There was a preacher on the radio who told him to touch the radio to be healed. He touched it and got up and told his aunt that he felt like punching her in the nose when she asked how he felt. Saying this was a signal that he had recovered. He also remembers his father owning a grocery store in St. Louis and the beginning of Urban

Renewal in 1957. Michael calls it Urban Removal because it removed several black owned and operated businesses in the neighborhood. 12. Michael describes his mother as a calm person who never worked in her life and loves to wear hats to church. He also tells a story about his father trying to teach his mother to drive (she hit a tree and never drove again). 13. Michael's maternal grandparents were named William Evans and Mary Anne Trotter Evans. There's a story that his grandmother had American Indian blood or ancestry. Michael's paternal grandparents were named Nathaniel and Bessie Battle. They had 8 children, and all of them moved to Minnesota (except Michael's father). 14. Michael was told a lot of stories while growing up. One had to do with his father's brother who was drowned when he was young; he had apparently offended someone. He also was told stories of his father's rebelliousness. He was a bootlegger during Prohibition. 15. Michael remembers the sight and smell red clay dirt. People would eat it because they thought it was medicinal. They also used it as an air freshener because of its aroma. He also remembers his father always stressing education since he only finished the 3rd Grade. 16. As a child, Michael describes himself as being bad and tough but always engaged in something. He used his tough persona in public school as protection for himself and his sisters. 17. Michael's childhood dream was to live beyond the age of 40 because of his heart condition. He also wanted to be a lawyer. 18. He begins to discuss growing up in St. Louis in the 1950's.

Time Codes

1. Birthdate/Place 01:01.40:00 2. Occupation 01:02.01:26
3. Favorites 01:03.47:08 4. Parents 01:05.05:10 5. Siblings
01:05.48:14 6. Trace back to 4 Generations 01 :06.29: 11
7. Ancestors' ethnicity 01:07.44:18 8. Great uncle
01:08.41:00 9. Great uncle's stories 01:09.28:25 10. Story
of why his father leaves Mississippi 01: 10.19: 11 1 L
Earliest Memory 01: 12.54: 10 12. Describes his mother
01:17.49.09 13. Grandparents 01:19.52:28 14. Stories
01:21.34:08 15. Sights, sounds, smells 01:23.08:26 16.
What kind of child were you? 01:26.15:10 17. Childhood
Dreams 01:27.41:24 18. Growing up in St. Louis

01:28:32:07

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle,
Section A2004_032_001_002, TRT: 0:28:50 2004/03/22

Dr. Michael A. Battle, president of Interdenominational Theological Center, talks about growing up in a nurturing, close-knit African American neighborhood in St. Louis Missouri, in the 1950s and 1960s. He discusses the destructive myths about black neighborhoods and the segregated black schools at that time, and examines the deterioration of black communities in the years since his own youth. He recalls his experiences at school and church and mentions some individual church folks who had a positive influence on him and other youth.

1. In the 1950's, Michael describes his St. Louis neighborhood as a supportive community. Everyone was like family, even though, they were not blood relatives. There were no dangers or worries about safety. All socioeconomic classes lived there together (doctors, laborers, teachers, ministers, etc.). Around the 1960's, Michael states Black people believed the lie of non-Black sociologists that stated the Black neighborhoods were dangerous. that Black schools were inherently inferior, and that Blacks spent too much time in church. As a result, the Black upper class "escaped" from the Black neighborhoods. 2. Michael also talks about the problems of integration. That it took a lot of soul from African American life. 3. Michael talks about his experiences in church and tells the story about wanting to hear the Cassius Clay/Sonny Liston fight instead of going to church. 4. Before his father had his own church, Michael attended Lively Stone Church. Other than his father and grandfather, Bishop Phillip Scott made the biggest impression on Michael. Michael was also in the choir and was allowed to stay out late because of choir activities. He met his wife in the choir. 5. Michael remembers a Mother Tides who is just one example of the people at his church who encouraged young people like himself to succeed in life. 6. Michael attended Lincoln Elementary School. 7. He describes himself as a decent student, but he started to do better around the 7th and 8th Grades. He tells a story about when he was intentionally

held back and had to repeat the 5th Grade. His teacher flunked him because the teacher's mother's sandwich business was put out of business by Michael's father's popular and successful restaurant. 8. Michael attended Sodan High School. He played trumpet in the band, was president of the Latin Club and Junior Classical League and was a member of the Model of United Nations and Allied Youth. He says he had a lot of fun in high school.

Time Codes 1. Growing up in St. Louis 02:00.41:14 2. Problem of Integration 02:05.14:03 3. Story about Cassius Clay/Sonny Liston fight 02:07.47:16 4. Church Experience 02:09.30: 19 5. Mother Tides 02:12.58.23 6. Elementary School 02:14.18:09 7. Story of repeating 5th Grade 02: 14.35:28 8. High School 02:24.36:29

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle, Section A2004_032_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40 2004/03/22

Interdenominational Theological Center president Michael A. Battle talks about his adolescence including influential teachers and experiences at Soledad High School in St. Louis, Missouri and at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He also talks about extracurricular activities including his volunteer work with the African American community in Hartford, teaching a GED course four nights a week. Battle also mentions his involvement with Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign while he was in seminary at Duke University.

1. Michael lists his favorite high school teachers. 2. Two people he wants to acknowledge for his undergraduate success are Dr. John Gettia and Michael P. Gatling. Gatling was a soldier from St. Louis who died in Vietnam. His family set up a scholarship that was given to Michael so that he could attend Trinity University. 3. Outside of school, Michael was on the swimming team for the city of St. Louis, participated in church activities and has had a job since the age of 12. He would do neighbors' yards and shovel snow in the winter. He bought his own clothes and eye glasses from then on. Also, one year he decided to watch no television for an entire year. 4. Michael's first encounter with political life started when he was at Duke University working at S1. Joseph's AME Church. Rev. Phillip Robert Cousin assigned Michael to Jimmy Carter's

campaign. Then, in Hampton, V A, he chaired the election campaign for John Malory Phillips, the first black Vice Mayor of the city of Hampton. He also got involved with the NAACP, was Board of Directors for Rainbow PUSH and helped with Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. 5. Michael remembers his father bringing home some donated books. He read Ernest Hemingway's Old Man and the Sea; it was the first book he ever read cover to cover. He discovered that proper reading could place him inside the story with the characters. 6. Michael also played little league baseball as a child. He was not any good, but he had fun. He learned the lesson of getting engaged in things and trying before becoming an expert at them. 7. Michael attended Trinity University in Hartford, CT. He was determined to leave St. Louis and join the Black Panther Party while in college. He tells the story of his father calling a Bishop Allen who would look out for him while in college, While at Trinity, he taught OED classes four nights a week. He taught the students how to take tests, and the passing rate for the students increased to 85%. 8. Michael participated in off-campus activities. He was a mentor, a sponsor of a youth activities group, and was a part of the Trinity Coalition for Blacks on campus. He felt guilty about going to Trinity because there were several rich people who went there. He felt compelled to help the less fortunate in the community. He became a student assistant in the Religion Department and studied in Switzerland his sophomore year. 9 .. After Trinity, he went to Duke Univ. for his Master's and Howard Univ. for his Doctorate.

Time Codes

1. Favorite High School Teachers 03:00.51:16 2. Two others he wants to acknowledge 03:03.32: 18 3. Activities outside of School 03:06.01:27 4. Political Experiences 03:08.29: 14 5. Books 03: 11.00:20 6. Other activities 03: 13.32:25 7. Trinity Univ. 03:17.15:06 8. Activities @ Trinity 03:25.05:08 9. After Trinity 03:28.10:21

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle, Section A2004_032_001_004, TRT: 0:28:00 2004/03/22

Dr. Michael A. Battle talks about his career -- twenty years as chaplain at Hampton University, followed by

vice-president jobs at Virginia State and Chicago State, and then the presidency of Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Battle explains how throughout his career he emphasized providing mentorship and counsel to African American students. He also discusses his family and reflects on his accomplishments and his personal philosophy.

1. Michael's first professional job after finishing seminary school was as Hampton University's chaplain and pastor of Memorial Church on campus. He became the first Black full-time chaplain in the history of the school. He was 25 years old at the time and stayed there for almost 21 years. He was also in the Army Reserve (enlisted because of admiration for Michael P. Gatling) and retired as lieutenant colonel. He left Hampton Univ. in 1996 because he wanted to be president of an institution. And he knew it wouldn't happen at Hampton being only the chaplain. He took a job at Virginia State Univ. as Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, which he thought might help him get a presidential position in the future. After 18 months there, he was invited by Dr. Elnore Daniel to be Vice President of Student Affairs at Chicago State Univ. While there, he published two articles about Hampton Univ. Dr. Henry Young, theology professor at Garrett Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL, read these articles and nominated Michael for president of ITC, the position he holds now.
2. A memorable event during Michael's professional life was discovering that what he learned at Duke Univ. didn't work with Black students at Hampton Univ. in counseling. He tells that story.
3. Michael was also a part of the American Committee on Africa and went to South Africa to help with the election of Nelson Mandela as president. All this happened because of his connection with Y.T. Walker, who was Dr. King's Chief of Staff.
4. Michael says he's had no traumas during his professional life, only challenges. He doesn't define it as traumas. Helping students at Hampton Univ., problems with accreditation at ITC, and working with soldiers who fought in the war in Grenada were and are all challenges for him.
5. His message for his children and grandchildren are that they always understand that there's inherent value

in just being who they are. No one is inherently better than you, and you aren't inherently better than anyone else. 6. He feels good about the way he's lived his life. 7. Michael says his greatest contribution hasn't happened yet. 8. He, then, talks about his wife, Linda, and how they met. He also lists his three children. 9. His fondest memory of parenting is being involved in PTA and watching his children become totally different people. 10. Michael's greatest challenge as a parent was trying to make sure that his children kept a sense of balance in life. Also, the fact that his two sons somewhat rebelled against education because he stressed it so much. 11. Michael's favorite thing about being at Hampton Univ. was watching the men of Alpha Phi Alpha all collectively drop out of line because there was hazing going on. Also, the Grooves helped bring many students to the chapel for services while he was chaplain there.

Time Codes 1. Adult Life 04:00.41 :27 2. Memorable Events 04:07.04:04 3. Y.T. Walker and the American Committee on Africa 04:08.55:13 4. Challenges during Professional career 04: 12.03:09 5. Message for his children and grandchildren 04: 13.58: 14 6. How do you feel about the way you lived your life? 04: 16.01: 15 7. Greatest Contribution 04:16.41:14 8. His family (wife and children) 04:17.42:22 9. Fondest memory of parenting 04:20.35:21 10. Greatest challenge as a parent 04:21.33: 12 11. Favorite thing while at Hampton Univ. 04:25.15:10

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael A. Battle,
Section A2004_032_001_005, TRT: 0:20:25 2004/03/22