

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alfred Cain

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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>	Cain, Alfred, 1921-2011
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 15, 2004, January 19, 2007 and January 4, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004, 2005 and 2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:57:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Choral director Alfred Cain (1921 - 2011 ) worked as a musical director with a range of talented actors, including Cicely Tyson, Roscoe Lee Brown, Clarence Williams III, James Earl Jones, Frank Silvera, Juanita Hall, and Isabel Sanford. In addition to his activities in the music industry, Cain worked as an editor, author and speechwriter for Roland Burris. Alfred Cain passed away on December 30, 2011. Cain was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2004, January 19, 2007 and January 4, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_263
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Musical director and writer Alfred Earl Cain was born October 5, 1921, in Warrior, Alabama. Cain's mother was the former Helen Hazel Moore and his father, Louis Cain, was a graduate of Tuskegee Institute. Cain attended Trinity School in Alabama and Nathan Hale Junior High School in Brooklyn, New York; he graduated from Alexander Hamilton High School in 1939, where he was a member of the school chorus, the Frederick Douglass Society, and wrote for the *Hamiltonian*. Drafted in 1943, Cain was stationed at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio. Cain earned a B.A. degree in 1949, and an M.A. degree from Columbia University in public law and government in 1951; while at Columbia, he became president of the local chapter of the NAACP and formed an NAACP chorus, which featured Doug Pugh, Deke Johnson, and future opera great, Leontyne Price. Cain served as a social investigator for the New York City Department of Welfare from 1951 to 1959, when he decided to serve as his church's full time musical director.

Cain worked as the musical director for Vinette Carroll's production of *Dark of the Moon* in 1950, and recorded with Fred Norman's The Normanares Quartet in 1953, featuring Brock Peters and Theresa Merritt. Cain was also musical director for *Trumpets of God* and James Baldwin's *Amen Corner* in 1960. Some of the talent that Cain worked with included: Cicely Tyson, Roscoe Lee Brown, Clarence Williams III, James Earl Jones, Frank Silvera, Juanita Hall, and Isabel Sanford. A talented writer, Cain worked for Educational Heritage of Yonkers as editor of *The Negro Heritage Reader for Young People* and *The Winding Road to Freedom: A Documentary History of Negro Experiences in America*, both published in 1965. Cain also served as an editor of the syndicated insert *Tuesday Magazine* in the 1970s and as a staff writer at Prentice-Hall Publishers.

After moving to Chicago in 1981, Cain served as communications director and speechwriter for former Illinois

Attorney General Roland Burris. He was an active member of Ingleside-Whitfield United Methodist Church where he served as a columnist for the *United Methodist Northern Illinois Conference Reporter*.

Cain passed away on December 30, 2011 at age 90.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alfred Cain was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 15, 2004, January 19, 2007 and January 4, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Choral director Alfred Cain (1921 - 2011 ) worked as a musical director with a range of talented actors, including Cicely Tyson, Roscoe Lee Brown, Clarence Williams III, James Earl Jones, Frank Silvera, Juanita Hall, and Isabel Sanford. In addition to his activities in the music industry, Cain worked as an editor, author and speechwriter for Roland Burris. Alfred Cain passed away on December 30, 2011.

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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:

Cain, Alfred, 1921-2011

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cain, Alfred, 1921-2011--Interviews

African American authors--Interviews.

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African American choral conductors--Interviews.

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Speechwriters--Interviews.

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African American conductors (Music)--Interviews.

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African American musicians--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:**

Choral Director

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MusicMakers

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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 Alfred Cain, December 15, 2004, January 19, 2007 and January 4, 2005. 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 Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Alfred Cain was born on October 5, 1921 in Warrior, Alabama. His mother, Helen Moore, was born in 1900 in Wetempka, Alabama and had ten siblings. Cain's maternal grandmother remarried a presiding elder of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Anniston, Alabama. Cain listened to his grandmother recite elocutions at the dinner table. His father, Louis Cain, enjoyed playing baseball and attended Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to train as a shoemaker. Cain's paternal grandfather, a police officer and a farmer, lived in Athens, Alabama where Cain picked cotton. As a young boy, Cain was struck by discovering spring flowers while riding the train in Alabama; later, he wrote about this experience. He moved with his mother to Brooklyn, New York, New York at age ten. There, he attended a Pentecostal church, went to the beach, visited the library and attended Nathan Hale Junior High School. Although he wanted to complete his secondary education at Trinity School in Athens, Cain completed his schooling in Brooklyn.

African American authors--Interviews.

African American choral conductors--Interviews.

Speechwriters--Interviews.

African American conductors (Music)--Interviews.

African American musicians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Alfred Cain attended Alexander Hamilton Vocational & Technical High School in Brooklyn, New York, New York. He participated in the Frederick Douglass Society, wrote a column for the school paper and edited the school's literary magazine. Despite his literary activities, he received mixed feedback about his writing from teachers. He was inspired by local poets of the era, including Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, whose wife he later met. Cain passed the Regents Examinations required to graduate, despite an error with the test. In 1939, Cain matriculated at City College of New York, but could not afford to stay. He worked for a model airplane company and Barclay Tissue Corporation in Brooklyn before being drafted by the U.S. military in 1943. During World War II, he was stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio where he met his future wife, a student at Wilberforce University. He regularly visited nearby Dayton and met Charles H. Wesley who inspired Cain's commitment to the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Alfred Cain first heard Charles H. Wesley speak at the Bordentown School in New Jersey. He saw memorable performances, including an American Negro Theater production of Orson Wells' adaptation of 'Macbeth' and Billy Eckstine's appearance in Dayton, Ohio. While stationed at Wright-Patterson Air

Force Base, Cain joined an all-black chorus that sang on the radio. In 1946, Cain matriculated at Columbia University in New York, New York where he majored in public law and government and reconnected with his future wife. As president of Columbia's NAACP chapter, he established a NAACP choir. He also wrote to the university's president, future U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, to argue for banning a segregated fraternity; Eisenhower did not respond. Cain sang with Leontyne Price at International House New York as she was entering the height of her fame. He joined The Belafonte Singers as a replacement for Charles Coleman and worked as musical director for Vinnette Justine Carroll's 'Dark of the Moon' in the 1950s.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Alfred Cain worked as a social investigator for the New York City Department of Welfare in the 1950s and 1960s. Concurrently, Cain was the musical director for Vinnette Justine Carroll's production of 'Dark of the Moon,' which received mixed reviews from some African American theater figures, including Juanita Hall, who thought its boisterous musical numbers verged on stereotypical. He was billed as choral director for Carroll's 'Trumpets of the Lord,' adapted from James Weldon Johnson's 'God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse,' although he had also contributed to its literary production. Conversely, he was listed as musical director of James Baldwin's 'The Amen Corner,' starring Beah Richards and Frank Silvera, despite having made a smaller contribution. In the 1960s, Cain was hired as choral director for Antioch Baptist Church before joining Educational Heritage, Inc.'s documentary project, the Negro Heritage Library, as an editor and writer. Cain also talks about Theresa Merritt's acting career.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_002\_005, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Alfred Cain wrote for Educational Heritage, Inc., a publishing company founded by Noel N. Marder. Cain's first book in 1965, 'The Winding Road to Freedom,' incorporated historical documents to depict important events in the African American struggle for freedom. His next book, 'Negro Heritage Reader for Young People,' included a comic strip by Tom Feelings. Shortly after Cain was promoted to editor at Heritage, HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker offered him a position in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which Cain declined. Heritage's white ownership and competition for sales led to a strained relationship with the Association for the Study of African American Life & History. The company never managed to publish all its planned works for the Negro Heritage Library, and its financial problems caused Cain to leave. He then worked as an editor for Tuesday magazine. Cain also remembers hearing Carter G. Woodson and Mary McCleod Bethune speak when he was in high school.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_002\_006, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Alfred Cain was a senior editor at Prentice Hall between 1967 and 1971. During this time, he worked on several publications, including 'Reuther,' a biography of Walter Reuther by Frank Cormier and William J. Eaton and a study of labor history, 'Divided We Fall,' which Cain personally found very moving. In 1971, he relocated to Chicago, Illinois for an editorial position at Tuesday magazine. He also occasionally wrote for the food section of Tuesday At Home under a female pseudonym. Cain left Tuesday in 1974 and co-founded Living Together, a monthly newspaper supplement in the Chicago Sun-Times; however, financial difficulties stopped the project after a few months. He briefly returned to work for Tuesday magazine until the publication disbanded in 1977. Afterwards, Cain wrote for a Kraft Foods series, 'The Heritage of Cooking,' before joining

HistoryMaker The Honorable Roland Burris' campaign as communications director in the late 1970s. Cain also explains significance of the name Tuesday magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_002\_007, TRT: 0:27:30 ?

Alfred Cain joined the newly formed Chicago Society of Writers and Editors, established by Alfred A. Duckett, in the early 1970s. When HistoryMaker Carole Simpson took a position in Washington, D.C., Cain substituted for her writing class at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He worked for HistoryMaker the Honorable Roland Burris as a communications director and later, speechwriter. As a member of Burris' staff, Cain attended the 1980 Democratic National Convention in New York, New York and contributed to a publication explaining the use of taxpayer funds in a comprehensible and transparent way. After retiring in 1987, Cain became more active at Ingleside-Whitfield United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois where he was a member of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal. Cain recalls Burris' political reputation and remembers a positive reception to one of his speeches in Chicago. Cain reflects upon his life and legacy and describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_002\_008, TRT: 0:19:40 ?

Alfred Cain hosted a weekly gathering at his home for Chicago Society of Writers and Editors. The meetings later moved to a local pub until the society slowly disbanded in the early 1980s after the death of Cain's good friend, Alfred A. Duckett. Cain's career was honored in 1997 at the event Salute to Alfred E. Cain, held at his church, Ingleside-Whitfield United Methodist, in Chicago, Illinois. Although his mother was blind at the time, she managed, with the help of Cain's cousin, to travel to Chicago and attend the event. She enjoyed the experience and Cain treasured her presence there, as she passed away shortly after. Cain describes how he would like to be remembered, then concludes the tape by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Alfred Cain, Section A2004\_263\_003\_009, TRT: 0:13:11 ?

Alfred Cain narrates his photographs.