

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Shuttlesworth, Fred L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Dates:	March 25, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:59:05).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist, pastor, and foundation executive Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth (1922 - 2011) established the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) in 1956, and joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and Bayard Rustin to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1956. In 1966, Shuttlesworth became the pastor of the Greater New Light Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and served as founding director of the Shuttlesworth Housing Foundation. Shuttlesworth was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 25, 2006, in Cincinnati, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_053
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

One of the most relentless figures of the Civil Rights Movement, the Reverend Fred Lee Shuttlesworth was born on March 18, 1922, in Montgomery County, Alabama. His biological father was Vetta Greene. However, Shuttlesworth was

raised by his mother, Alberta Robinson Shuttlesworth and his stepfather, William Nathan Shuttlesworth, a farmer in rural Oxmoor, Alabama. Shuttlesworth attended Oxmoor Elementary School where he was mentored by teacher Israel Ramsey. He started as a student at Wenonah School, but graduated from Rosedale High School in 1940. Shuttlesworth married Ruby Keeler, a nurse, in 1941 and moved to Mobile in 1943 where he became a truck driver and studied auto mechanics. Rev. E.A. Palmer encouraged Shuttlesworth to attend Cedar Grove Academy, a local bible college. In 1945, he delivered a sermon at Selma University and decided to pursue his A.B. degree there and later at Alabama State College. By 1950, Shuttlesworth was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, and in 1953, he returned to Birmingham as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church.

In May of 1956, at a mass meeting at Bethel, Shuttlesworth established the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). In December of that year, the United States Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, was illegal. Shuttlesworth immediately announced that the ACMHR was going to test segregation laws in Birmingham. On Christmas night the Shuttlesworth house was blown up by sixteen sticks of Ku Klux Klan dynamite. Shuttlesworth, who landed in the basement and whose bedroom was blown apart, and visiting Deacon Charles Robinson were unharmed. Shuttlesworth, then, led a rally the very next day. He was beaten by police in 1957 for trying to enroll his daughter in an all white school and that same year joined with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and Bayard Rustin to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He also assisted the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) in organizing the Freedom Rides. Shuttlesworth was hospitalized in 1963 as a result of being attacked by Sheriff Bull Connor's water cannons as he led a mass nonviolent demonstration. However, Shuttlesworth continued to work to secure Birmingham's public accommodations and the desegregation of its schools.

In 1966, Shuttlesworth became the pastor of the Greater New Light Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and served as founding director of the Shuttlesworth Housing Foundation. The recipient of numerous awards, Shuttlesworth was a remarkable figure and unsung hero of the Civil Rights Movement.

Shuttlesworth passed away on October 5, 2011.

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 25, 2006.

This life oral history interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 25, 2006, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist, pastor, and foundation executive Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth (1922 - 2011) established the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) in 1956, and joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, and Bayard Rustin to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1956. In 1966, Shuttlesworth became the pastor of the Greater New Light Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and served as founding director of the Shuttlesworth Housing Foundation.

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:

Shuttlesworth, Fred L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Shuttlesworth, Fred L. --Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

Endowments--Officials and employees--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|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 Fred Shuttlesworth, March 25, 2006. 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).

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 Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_001, TRT: 0:30:14 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth was born on March 18, 1922 in Montgomery County, Alabama to Alberta Robinson Shuttlesworth and Vetta Greene. When Shuttlesworth was a toddler, his maternal grandparents, March Robinson and Martha Robinson, brought him, his mother and his oldest sister, Cleola Shuttlesworth Willis, to Oxmoor, Alabama, to take them away from Shuttlesworth's father. As a boy, Shuttlesworth helped his grandfather plow their fields and collect garbage in town. When he was five years old, his mother married William Shuttlesworth, a much older man. At this time, his name was changed from Freddie Robinson to Fred Shuttlesworth. His stepfather initially worked in the local mines, but later became a bootlegger. He also owned a Ford Model T, although it frequently broke down. Shuttlesworth began his education at Oxmoor Elementary School in Birmingham, Alabama, and excelled as a student. His mother, a strict and religious woman, required him to attend St. Matthew A.M.E. Church Oxmoor every Sunday.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

Endowments--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_002, TRT: 0:29:38 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth helped his maternal grandfather, March Robinson, collect garbage by mule in Birmingham, Alabama. Once, after his grandfather beat the mule, it destroyed their wagon. However, Shuttlesworth remembers his grandfather as a usually kind man. Shuttlesworth's stepfather, bootlegger William Shuttlesworth, brought Shuttlesworth to distill liquor early in the morning, often cursing at him when he did not wake up. His stepfather was small but strong, and was once assaulted a drunk customer. During family meals, his stepfather prepared plates for all eight of Shuttlesworth's siblings, and insulted them as he did so. Shuttlesworth's

mother, Alberta Robinson Shuttlesworth, suspected his stepfather of cheating with a neighbor, and they often fought violently. During one confrontation, Shuttlesworth's mother lost her eye. At Oxmoor Elementary School, Shuttlesworth was taught by Israel Ramsey, who kept him from answering questions so that he would not embarrass the older students.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_003, TRT: 0:30:09 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth had great respect for his teacher, Israel Ramsey, at Oxmoor Elementary School near Birmingham, Alabama. Shuttlesworth attended Birmingham's Wenonah High School for one year, and then transferred to the nearby Rosedale High School. The school was led by Principal B.M. Montgomery. Shuttlesworth played football, although the team lacked funds for uniforms. In 1940, he graduated as valedictorian, and his stepfather, William Shuttlesworth, passed away. He told the white sheriff, Newton Hubbard, where to find his stepfather's illegal distillery equipment, and was briefly arrested. To support his family, Shuttlesworth worked at a hospital, where he met nursing student Ruby Keeler Shuttlesworth. They married after three months of courtship, when Shuttlesworth was nineteen years old. The couple initially lived with their families, and then purchased a house in Birmingham. Shuttlesworth later moved to Mobile, Alabama to work at the Brookley Army Airfield.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_004, TRT: 0:30:35 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth worked as a truck driver and studied engine repair at the Brookley Army Airfield in Mobile, Alabama. He lived in a boarding house while constructing his own home in Mobile, but decided to move out early after a female tenant made advances on him. He called for his wife, Ruby Keeler Shuttlesworth, and newborn daughter, Patricia Shuttlesworth Massengill, to join him in Mobile. At Mobile's Corinthian Baptist Church, Shuttlesworth became a Baptist under the tutelage of Pastor E. A. Palmer. An active church member, Shuttlesworth spoke at the Sunday school, and worked

with L.S. Maynard, a white preacher and goodwill missionary to the African American community. Shuttlesworth also studied at Cedar Grove Academy Bible College. After Shuttlesworth gave a speech at Selma University in Selma, Alabama, its President C.S. Dinkins invited him to attend, and offered a house and a cow as financial aid. While studying in Selma, Shuttlesworth preached at the First Baptist Church of Selma.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_005, TRT: 0:29:58 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth preached at several rural churches near Selma, Alabama, and was involved with the local NAACP. In 1950, he was hired as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Selma, and the congregation built him a new parsonage. However, he clashed with the deacons, including J.D. Pritchard and plumber Ben Harris. Their conflict escalated when Shuttlesworth asked for plumbing bids to install toilets in the church, and instructed the deacons not act without his approval. In 1952, Shuttlesworth resigned. Returning to Birmingham, Alabama, Pastor D.L. Motley asked him to give a sermon at Bethel Baptist Church. The congregation invited Shuttlesworth to return, and eventually asked Shuttlesworth to replace Motley as pastor. He accepted the position in 1953. At Bethel Baptist Church, Shuttlesworth sought to connect his sermons to congregants' everyday lives, and often preached against segregation. He also describes his conversations with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
Section A2006_053_001_006, TRT: 0:28:31 2006/03/25

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth increased his civil rights activities after the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. After Alabama Governor John Malcolm Patterson banned the NAACP following the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Shuttlesworth met with NAACP leaders like Arthur Shores and Lucinda B. Robey. Shuttlesworth then publicly called for a mass meeting of Birmingham's African American citizens. Local media outlets broadcast the news, including Shuttlesworth's address. The night before the meeting, Luke Beard, the

pastor of 15th Street Baptist Church, encouraged Shuttlesworth to cancel the meeting, but he refused. Instead, Shuttlesworth organized the meeting's participants to form the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, and continued his vocal protests of segregation. On Christmas Eve of 1956, the Ku Klux Klan bombed Shuttlesworth's home and the adjacent Bethel Baptist Church. Although Shuttlesworth and his family were inside with Deacon Charles Robinson, everyone survived unharmed.