Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Cross, Rev. John H.

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rev. John H. Cross,

Dates: April 13, 2006

Bulk Dates: 2006

Physical Description: 3 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:30:00).

Abstract: Pastor Rev. John H. Cross (1925 - 2007) was the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, site of the September 15, 1963 bombing that killed four young girls and marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Later, he was director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, and Black Church Relations Director of Atlanta Baptist Association of the Atlanta Baptist Association. Cross was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2006_075

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr., was born to Margie Ann and John H. Cross, Sr., on January 27, 1925, in Haynes, Arkansas. He attended elementary school at Spring Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Haynes, Arkansas, and Lincoln High School in Forrest City, Arkansas. As a teenager, Cross gave his trial sermon and was ordained at Springfield Missionary Baptist Church.

After high school, in 1944, Cross entered the United States Army as an assistant regimental chaplain. Completing his tour of duty, he worked as a teacher for the Haynes public schools. Cross attended Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, where he met and married his wife, Julia. Cross earned his B.A. degree in social science in 1950. He then worked as a counselor for boys and as a minister at Oak Grove Baptist Church in Widewater, Virginia. Cross returned to Virginia Union University’s School of Theology and received his M.Div. degree in 1959.

Cross was working as pastor of Gravel Hill Baptist Church in 1962 when he was called to pastor the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The church became a haven for civil rights organizers and a target for Southern segregationists. On September 15, 1963, the church was bombed. The explosion killed four young girls, injured many others, and marked a turning point in the civil rights movement. Cross stayed on as pastor until 1968. He was appointed director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, where he taught history and sociology. Cross then moved to Decatur, Georgia, where he became the associate pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church for seven years. Cross served as the black church relations director of the Atlanta...
Baptist Association from 1977 until he retired in 1989. After retirement, Cross stay involved in several part-time ministries, such as chaplain at the DeKalb and Fulton County youth development centers and as interim pastor at Divine Unity and Liberty Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cross has received numerous awards and proclamations for his role in the civil rights movement and his dynamic leadership at the historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, as well as his work to improve race relations, missions and ecumenism in the United States and Africa. Cross has four children: Michael, Alma, Lynn, and Barbara, who was his caregiver.

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr. passed away on November 15, 2007, at the age of 82.

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 13, 2006.

---

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Rev. John H. Cross was conducted by Denise Gines on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 3 Betacam SP videocassettes. Pastor Rev. John H. Cross (1925 - 2007 ) was the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, site of the September 15, 1963 bombing that killed four young girls and marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Later, he was director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, and Black Church Relations Director of Atlanta Baptist Association of the Atlanta Baptist Association.

---

**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:**

Rev. John H. Cross
Gines, Denise (Interviewer)
Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Rev. John H. Cross--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Alabama--Birmingham--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American Baptists--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Baptists.

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 12/1/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rev. John H. Cross

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, April 13, 2006

Video Oral History Interview with Rev. John H. Cross, Section A2006_075_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2006/04/13

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr. was born on January 27, 1925 in Haynes, Arkansas to Margie Ann Cross, a housewife, and John Cross, Sr. He attended elementary school at Spring Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Haynes, Arkansas. Cross gave his first sermon as a teenager and was ordained at Springfield Missionary Baptist Church in Haynes, Arkansas. Cross attended Lincoln High School in Forrest City, Arkansas and after graduating in 1944, he joined the United States Army. Cross left the Army and moved to Richard, Virginia to attend Virginia Union University, where he met his wife Julia Ball. He earned his B.A. degree in social science in 1950 and his M.Div. degree in 1962. Cross briefly pastored Oak Grove Baptist Church in Widewater, Virginia and Gravel Hill Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia before moving to Birmingham, Alabama in June 1962 to pastor the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

African American families--Arkansas--Haynes.
African American children--Arkansas--Haynes.
African American clergy.
African Americans--Education (Higher)--Virginia--Richmond.
African American Baptists.
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).
Oak Grove Baptist Church (Virginia Beach, Va.).
Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.)--Students.
African American churches--Virginia--Virginia Beach.


Reverend John Haywood Cross became a minister and the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. As pastor, Cross was very active with community organizations and with members of the civil rights movement. Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth used Cross's church as the headquarters for meetings for the civil rights movement in Birmingham to assist with desegregation efforts. Cross remembers the day of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. He removed some of the debris and found the bodies of four little girls: Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Denise McNair. Cross discusses that the first trial after the bombing was held in 1977. He concludes this segment of the interview by describing how twenty-
three other children were injured and two young boys were killed the same day of the bombing.

African American clergy.
Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama.
Civil rights movements--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.
African American churches--Alabama--Birmingham.
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).
Shuttlesworth, Fred L., 1922-2011.
16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Ala., 1963.
African American Baptists--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Rev. John H. Cross, Section A2006_075_001_003, TRT: 0:31:10 2006/04/13

Reverend John Haywood Cross discusses the resilience of members of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and its rebuilding period after the bombing. Barbara Ann Cross slates the interview and discusses her experiences during the bombing. On Sunday, September 15, 1963, Barbara Cross was a student in the church's Sunday school class. She remembers there was a horrific noise and the church went dark. Her friend, Aida Mae Collins and three other girls were found dead. Barbara Cross remembers Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, A. D. Williams King, and Dick Gregory arrived at her father's home to assist with funeral arrangements. She talks about how the climate of Birmingham changed and the 1960s civil rights movement contributed to support for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On February 20, 2006 the church became a national landmark. Barbara Cross ends the interview by describing family photographs.

Abernathy, Ralph, 1926-1990.
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.
Civil rights movements--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).
16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Ala., 1963.
African American Baptists--Alabama.
African American churches--Alabama--Birmingham.
African Americans--Alabama--Social conditions.
Gregory, Dick.