

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bobby L. Wilson

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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>	Wilson, Bobby L.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 11, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:24:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Environmental chemist and academic administrator Bobby L. Wilson (1942 - ) rose to the position of provost at Texas Southern University and served in a leadership role in the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCCChE). Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2007, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_233
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Environmental chemist and academic administrator Bobby L. Wilson was born on September 30, 1942 in Columbus, Mississippi, the eldest child of Lilly Mae Wilson and Johnny B. Wilson. After graduating from Hunt High School in 1962, Wilson attended Alabama State University where he received his B.S. degree in chemistry. Wilson then took a teaching position at Booker T. Washington High School as a chemistry and physics teacher until he decided to continue his education in 1970. He received his M.S. degree in chemistry from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and did his doctoral work at Michigan State University where he received his Ph.D. degree in chemistry in 1976.

Wilson settled in Houston, Texas, where he became an assistant professor of chemistry at the historically black Texas Southern University (TSU) in 1976. In 1978, Wilson became the regional chairman of the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCCChE). After spending parts of 1982 and 1983 as a visiting research professor at Exxon's research and engineering facility in Baytown, Texas, Wilson returned to TSU to become a full professor of chemistry in 1985. One year later, Wilson began his involvement in the TSU administration, becoming an associate dean for the College of Arts and Sciences. By 1987, Wilson was head of the chemistry department, and during the 1989-1990 school year, he was the interim dean for the College of Arts and Sciences. Wilson then became the vice president for academic affairs in 1990, and in 1992, he was appointed to provost of TSU, a position he held until 1994, and again beginning in 1999. From 1996 to 1997, Wilson was the program director for the Centers of Research Excellence in Science and Technology at the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C. Wilson was named acting president of TSU for a few months in 2006 and again in 2007.

Over the course of his career as an environmental chemist, Wilson has had his research published dozens of times in addition to publishing two general chemistry textbooks. He gave over seventy major presentations to his peers,

advised dozens of doctoral theses, held three patents and won numerous research grants from institutions such as NASA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy and the Egyptian Government. In 1998, Wilson became a member of NOBCChE's executive board, and in 2005, he became chairman. Wilson also served on the executive board of the Texas Academy of Science.

Bobby Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 11, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bobby L. Wilson was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 11, 2007, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Environmental chemist and academic administrator Bobby L. Wilson (1942 - ) rose to the position of provost at Texas Southern University and served in a leadership role in the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE).

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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:

Wilson, Bobby L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Wilson, Bobby L.--Interviews

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African American chemists--Interviews.

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African American scientists--Interviews.

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African American college teachers--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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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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EducationMakers

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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 Bobby L. Wilson, August 11, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/23/2011 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, August 11, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson, Section A2007\_233\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:30  
2007/08/11

Bobby Wilson talks about his family background. His mother, Lillie Mae Coleman, was born on October 28, 1923 in Lowndes County, Mississippi. Her father (Wilson's maternal grandfather) was a sharecropper named Ed Coleman. Lillie Mae did not complete high school before marrying at a young age. Wilson's father, Johnny B. Wilson, was born on May 8, 1919 in Lowndes County, Mississippi. He was raised by his maternal grandfather, who owned land in Oklahoma. Wilson talks about his parents' upbringings and his early life with them. They owned their own land in Mississippi, and Wilson's father hired workers to pick cotton on the weekends which allowed Wilson to attend school. Wilson, however, was conscious of his classmates who came from less fortunate sharecropping families. As an additional income source, Wilson's mother ran the family owned grocery store/cafe. It was a lucrative business because it sold the only alcohol in the county.

African American families--Mississippi.

Sharecroppers--Mississippi.

African American parents--Mississippi.

Grandparents--Mississippi.

African American business enterprises--Mississippi.

Landowners--Mississippi.

African Americans--Mississippi--Lowndes County.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson, Section A2007\_233\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:30  
2007/08/11

Bobby Wilson talks about his personality and how it resembles each of his parents. Growing up, he was fully aware of the difference between his family who were landowners and other families who were sharecroppers. He talks about the importance of church in their small town of Plum Grove, Mississippi. Wilson was influenced by the Sputnik satellite launch of 1957 and always knew that he would study science. He was aware of the Cold War era "red scare" and the Civil Rights Movement because his family owned a television. Wilson talks about his experience at Hunts High School. He took it upon himself to take college prep courses and he was the number four ranked student in his class. After high school, Wilson moved in with his cousin in Montgomery, Alabama to attend Alabama State University.

Sharecroppers--Mississippi.

Landowners--Mississippi.

Social classes--Mississippi.

Sputnik satellites.

Cold War.

Civil rights movements--Mississippi.

Science--Study and teaching (Elementary).

African American students--Education (Secondary)--Mississippi.

African American students--Education (Higher)--Alabama--Montgomery.

Alabama State University--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson, Section A2007\_233\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:20  
2007/08/11

Bobby Wilson talks about his social and academic experience at Alabama State University where he acquired an appreciation for literature and art and also participated in student protests. Wilson discusses the politics surrounding Alabama at the time including Governor George Wallace's maintenance of his "separate but equal" doctrine. He talks about the campus climate around the assassination of John F. Kennedy as well as the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. During Wilson's time there, Alabama State was undergoing a presidential transition from the Trenholm family to Levi Watkins. Wilson shares the story about how he ended up as chemistry major at Alabama State University. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, Wilson taught high school physics and chemistry for three years. His decision to attend graduate school at Michigan State University was influenced by his teaching experience.

Alabama State University--Students.

African American students--Education (Higher)--Alabama--Montgomery.

Wallace, George C. (George Corley), 1919-1998.

Student movements--Alabama.

African Americans--Civil rights--Alabama.

Chemistry--Study and teaching (Higher)--Alabama--Montgomery.

Science--Study and teaching (Secondary).

African American teachers--Education (Secondary).

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson, Section A2007\_233\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:40  
2007/08/11

Bobby Wilson talks about applying to graduate schools. He was impressed with the financial offer from Michigan State University and chose to go there and major in inorganic chemistry. His work centered on the synthesis of a new compound called niobium and he received his Ph.D. in 1976 and was offered a position teaching at Texas Southern University. In 1995, Wilson had a nineteen month sabbatical with the National Science Foundation, but then returned to TSU. Wilson talks about his involvement with the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers. He finishes by talking about his role in raising funds as an administrator at Texas Southern University.

Universities and colleges--Study and teaching (Graduate)--United States.

Universities and colleges--Graduate work.

Michigan State University--Students.

African American graduate students--Michigan--East Lansing.

Chemistry, Inorganic--Study and teaching (Higher)--Michigan--East Lansing.

Niobium.

National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers.

Texas Southern University--Faculty.

African American college teachers--Texas--Houston.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby L. Wilson, Section A2007\_233\_001\_005, TRT: 0:22:15  
2007/08/11

Bobby Wilson shares his hopes and concerns for the black community. He

would like to see greater gains made in educational quality in the public school systems throughout the nation. He is also concerned with the cost of higher education and the lack of diversity at the HBCUs. Wilson talks about his children and shares their educational backgrounds. He discusses his research trip to Egypt and reflects on his career choices and legacy.

African Americans--Education.

African American universities and colleges.

Education--Vocational guidance.

African Americans--Conduct of life.

Adult children--Family relationships.