

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Larry Gossett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gossett, Larry, 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett,
Dates:	October 25, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:00:00).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and county council member Larry Gossett (1945 -) represented the State of Washington's District 10. He was involved in the presidential campaign of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. and was an organizer for the Rainbow Coalition. Gossett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 25, 2007, in Seattle, Washington. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_305
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Political activist Larry Gossett was born Lawrence Edward Gossett on February 21, 1945, in Seattle, Washington. The son of Johnnie Evelyn Carter Gossett and Nelman Gossett, he grew up in Seattle's southern and central areas. Gossett attended High Point and Horace Mann Elementary Schools and graduated from Franklin High School, where he was point guard on the basketball team. In 1963, Gossett was one of the few black males to attend the University of Washington.

In 1966, Gossett spent a year with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

Through VISTA, he received community organizing training with Harlem Youth, Inc. Gossett came back to Seattle as “Oba” and went on to become the school’s first student to graduate with a degree in African American Studies. Gossett was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a founder of the Seattle chapter of the Black Panther Party. He was a co-founder of the University of Washington’s Black Student Union (UWBSU) and used the organization to leverage the University of Washington’s Black Studies Program. Gossett attended the Black Youth Conference in Los Angeles, California in 1967 that featured James Forman, Harry Edwards, Tommie Smith and John Carlos. He was the organizer of the Seattle Alliance of Black Student Unions and helped organize nearly a dozen high school, middle school and collegiate black student unions throughout the Seattle area. On March 29, 1968, Gossett was arrested, but was later exonerated after leading a sit-in to protest the treatment of black students at Franklin High School.

In 1982, Gossett founded the Minority Executive Directors Coalition (MEDC). He served as the Executive Director for the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP) from 1979 to 1993 and helped to provide job assistance, a food bank and programs for at-risk youth. In the mid-1980s, Gossett was involved in the presidential campaign of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. and was an organizer for the Rainbow Coalition. As president of the Rainbow Push Coalition, Gossett supported Norman B. Rice’s mayoral candidacy in 1989. In 1991, Washington’s King County Council was expanded from nine to thirteen members, and in 1993, Gossett won a seat representing Washington’s District 10, an area stretching from the Montlake Cut to Beacon Hill. As a councilman, Gossett has dedicated his time to the reformation of the criminal justice system, better public transportation and job opportunities for the poor and minorities.

Gossett serves as a member and chair of the King County Council. Gossett, a high profile black activist with strong ties to the Hispanic, Asian and Native American communities, was a prime mover in 1996 for changing the symbol of King County (Seattle) from 19th century slaveholder, Rufus Devane King to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The county’s official logo was changed to an image of Dr. King. There is a fifty-eight minute documentary produced by University of Washington television that features Gossett’s BSU activism. The film is called *In Pursuit of Justice*.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Larry Gossett was conducted by Larry Crowe

on October 25, 2007, in Seattle, Washington, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and county council member Larry Gossett (1945 -) represented the State of Washington's District 10. He was involved in the presidential campaign of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. and was an organizer for the Rainbow Coalition.

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:

Gossett, Larry, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Gossett, Larry, 1945---Interviews

African American political activists--Washington (State)--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Washington (State)--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Rainbow Coalition (U.S.)

King County (Wash.)

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

County Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Larry Gossett, October 25, 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 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 Larry Gossett, Section
B2007_305_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett was born on February 21, 1945 in Seattle, Washington to Johnnie Carter Kelley and Nelmon Gossett. Gossett's maternal great-grandfather, Jefferson Carter, was a freed slave, who became a sharecropper in Nigton, Texas, a small all-black community located in the segregated East Texas. Both of his maternal grandparents,

Minnie Mark Carter and Clarence Carter, were born in Nigton, and his grandfather was a pastor in the Colored Methodist Episcopal church. Gossett's paternal great-grandfather, Green Gossett, was a former slave. Gossett's grandfather, Houston Gossett, owned a janitorial business in Colorado City, Texas, where he lived with his wife, Della Lawson Gossett. Both of Gossett's parents attended Texas College in Tyler, Texas, though neither graduated; choosing to marry instead, and move to Seattle for better job opportunities. In Seattle, Gossett's father worked as a ship scaler at Todd Pacific Shipyards, and as a mailman for the U.S. Post Office Department.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett, Section
B2007_305_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett lived in the High Point housing projects in Seattle, Washington until the age of ten. There, he attended the predominately white High Point School. In 1955, Gossett's family briefly lived in Texas before returning to Central Area, Seattle's historic black neighborhood. He then attended Horace Mann School and George Washington Junior High School. While in school, Gossett admired the city's African American athletes such as basketball players Elgin Baylor, Charles Brown, and football player Carver Gayton. He played point guard on the basketball teams at the Rotary Boys Club, the High Point Community Center and at his two high schools, James A. Garfield High School and Franklin High School. After graduation, Gossett was urged by his father, Nelmon Gossett, to attend the University of Washington in Seattle, where he was one of only forty-two African American students. He recalls attending Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s demonstration for open housing in Seattle in 1961.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett, Section
B2007_305_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett attended the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, where he majored in education. As one of the few minority students on campus, Gossett was not exposed to black studies or the Civil Rights Movement. He and many of the African American students dated their white classmates, which caused a

conflict between the school's football coach, Jim Owens, and four African American players. To avoid the Vietnam War draft, Gossett joined the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) during his junior year in 1966. That summer, Gossett completed his training for VISTA in Toledo, Ohio before moving to New York City, where he was assigned to work with Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited. While in Harlem, Gossett visited the African National Memorial Bookstore, and became interested in the Black Power Movement. After returning to Seattle, Gossett joined the city's chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee alongside fellow activists, Aaron Dixon and Carl Miller.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett, Section B2007_305_001_004, TRT: 0:28:10 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett was a member of the Seattle chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and attended the 1967 Black Youth Conference in Los Angeles, California. There, he learned about the newly formed Black Panther Party, and was inspired by the event's speakers, Civil Rights Leader James Forman and Sociologist Harry Edwards. After the conference, Gossett returned to Seattle, Washington, and established the Black Student Union (BSU) at the University of Washington. In March of 1968, Gossett and several other SNCC members, including Aaron Dixon, were arrested for organizing a sit-in at Franklin High School. While in jail, Gossett learned of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and the ensuing riots. Just a few months later, Gossett organized a second sit-in at the University of Washington in President Charles Odegaard's office, and presented BSU's five part plan, which was designed to better support the African American students on campus.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett, Section B2007_305_001_005, TRT: 0:31:20 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett was an active member of the University of Washington's Black Student Union, who successfully persuaded the administration to diversify the student body. As a result, Gossett became a student recruiter for the Educational Opportunity Program, and helped to raise minority student enrollment. In 1968, Gossett and fellow

activists Carl Miller, E.J. Brisker and Aaron Dixon attended the National Black Student Union Conference, where they met the Black Panther Party leaders. Gossett then helped Dixon to establish Seattle's Black Panther Party chapter. After graduating in 1970, Gossett remained at the University of Washington as a student supervisor in the Office of Minority Affairs. He left that position in 1973 to work for Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP), becoming its executive director in 1979. He remained at CAMP until 1993 when he was elected as a District 2 representative on the King County Council, which was renamed to honor Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Gossett, Section B2007_305_001_006, TRT: 0:30:10 2007/10/25

Larry Gossett was elected to Washington's King County Council in 1993. During his tenure, he led an initiative to formally rename the county in honor of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and to change the county's logo from an imperial crown to an image of Dr. King. Gossett met and married his wife, Rhonda Oden Gossett, while attending the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. Together, they had three children; Nicole Gossett, Malcolm Gossett and Langston Gossett. Gossett describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how he would like to be remembered. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.