

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Holton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Holton, Charles, 1930-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton,
Dates:	November 29, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:57:43).
Abstract:	Social service administrator and basketball player Charles Holton (1930 -) played with the Harlem Globetrotters from 1951 to 1957. He then became social services administrator for the State of Wisconsin. In 1997, Holton became executive director of Milwaukee's House of Peace, a Capuchin Franciscan Ministry, where he remained with until his retirement in 2000. Holton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 29, 2007, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_335
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Harlem Globetrotter Charles Holton was born on September 3, 1930 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Alice and Frank Holton. Holton attended St. Benedict School in Milwaukee, where he was a good athlete and played basketball. He graduated in 1948 at the age of eighteen. Holton was the first black to graduate from St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin with a B.S. in economics in 1952. Holton became a member of the Harlem Globetrotters, the then Chicago-based

basketball franchise headed by legendary coach William “Pop” Gates.

Invited to tryout for the Harlem Globetrotters at Chicago’s St. Anselm’s Gym, Holton became a member of the Abe Sapperstein’s Globetrotters, the popular barnstorming Chicago-based basketball franchise. He became a Harlem Globetrotter during their glory years (between 1951 and 1957) and witnessed first hand the passing of the comic basketball star baton from Reese “Goose” Tatum to Meadowlark Lemon. Holton made the Southern Harlem Globetrotters, one of three traveling squads. His teammates included Leon Hilliard, Junior Lee, Chico Burrell and Babe Pressley. In 1954, Holton and the Globetrotters were warmly welcomed in Europe and later in South America. Holton left the team at the age of twenty-seven in 1957.

Holton began working in social services as an administrator for Milwaukee County the following year, a position he would retain until 1966. In 1967, Holton obtained his M.S.W. degree from the University of Michigan and began working for the State of Wisconsin as a social services administrator, where he would remain until 1996. In 1997, Holton became executive director of Milwaukee’s House of Peace, a Capuchin Franciscan Ministry that Holton would lead until retirement in 2000.

Holton lives with his wife, Carol S. Oakes, whom he married in 1969. His daughter is Miss Lori the public television children’s host and his uncle is Chicago police commander and award winning mystery writer, Hugh Holton.

Holton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 29, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles Holton was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 29, 2007, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Social service administrator and basketball player Charles Holton (1930 -) played with the Harlem Globetrotters from 1951 to 1957. He then became social services administrator for the State of Wisconsin. In 1997, Holton became executive director of Milwaukee’s House of Peace, a Capuchin Franciscan Ministry, where he remained with until his retirement in 2000.

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:

Holton, Charles, 1930-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Holton, Charles, 1930---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Wisconsin

Harlem Globetrotters

Occupations:

Social Service Administrator

Basketball Player

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|SportsMakers

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 Charles Holton, November 29, 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 Charles Holton, Section
A2007_335_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/11/29

Charles Holton was born on September 3, 1930 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Alice Wilson Holton and Frank Holton, Jr. His mother came from Hot Springs, Arkansas, and lived for a time in Oklahoma before joining her father in Milwaukee, where he worked for the Heil Rail Joint Welding Company. Holton's father was born in 1908 in Heathman, Mississippi, where his ancestors worked in the fields and as domestics. After living in East St. Louis, Illinois, Holton's father moved to Milwaukee, where his siblings worked in the meatpacking industry. He attended Milwaukee's Fourth Street School through the eighth grade, and then worked in the tanneries; while Holton's mother, who had a ninth grade education, did housework. Holton's parents raised seven children, including Holton, in a predominantly black and Jewish community on the north side of Milwaukee. They both worked at defense factories during World War II, and Holton's father also tended the furnace at the Blessed Martin De Porres Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton, Section
A2007_335_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 2007/11/29

Charles Holton grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he spent his free time playing basketball and softball at the 9th Street playground. He also frequented the Miller Theatre, where he recalls hearing news of the bombing of Hawaii's Naval Station Pearl Harbor. Holton completed two years at Milwaukee's Ninth Street School, and then transferred to the St. Benedict the Moor School, a majority-black Catholic day school that also boarded out-of-state students. There, he wrote for the school newspaper; and studied African American history and literature under Charles Madison, who also coached football and track. During his teenage years, Holton worked for the Continental Baking Company, the producer of Hostess CupCakes and Twinkies. He also played guard on the high school basketball team, which competed against Milwaukee's other Catholic high schools, including Messmer High School and Marquette University High School. At this point in the interview, Holton talks about his preference for playing defense.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton, Section
A2007_335_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/11/29

Charles Holton played guard on Coach Nick Kanavas' basketball team at the St. Benedict the Moor High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and competed in the Catholic schools' state tournament at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. After graduating from high school in 1948, Holton received a partial scholarship to St. Norbert College, where he continued playing basketball. The school was a member of the Midlands Conference, alongside other Midwestern Catholic universities like Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana. At this point in the interview, Holton describes the notable basketball programs at Catholic universities. Holton majored in economics and minored in journalism, and became the first black graduate of St. Norbert College in 1952. That year, he was invited to try out for the southern unit of the Harlem Globetrotters basketball team. Holton describes the history of the Harlem Globetrotters; and the shifts in the game of basketball, including changes in scoring and shooting techniques.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton, Section

A2007_335_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/11/29

Charles Holton played guard for the Harlem Globetrotters' southern unit, which was the third team developed by the organization's founder and owner, Abe Saperstein. The all-black Harlem Globetrotters developed a reputation for combining showmanship with competition. They played against other exhibition teams, such as the Washington Generals and the Boston Whirlwinds; as well as local teams throughout the country. Holton and his teammates experienced discrimination while traveling in the segregated South, where they were often denied access to hotels and restaurants. He also recalls their surprise when they were welcomed by the owner of a hotel in a majority-white town in Texas. As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum in the late 1950s, Holton began to assert himself as a patron at majority-white establishments. He also talks about the pensions available to African American athletes, as well as the relationship between the Harlem Globetrotters team and the National Basketball Association.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton, Section
A2007_335_001_005, TRT: 0:29:56 2007/11/29

Charles Holton played guard for the Harlem Globetrotters' southern unit from 1952 to 1958. During this time, his teammates included Boid Buie and Roscoe "Duke" Cumberland, and he sometimes played with Marques Haynes and Reece "Goose" Tatum. In 1954, Holton's unit toured in Europe, where they were warmly received despite the European skepticism of Americans after World War II. In addition to playing basketball, Holton had the opportunity to visit historic sites like St. Peter's Square in Vatican City. He also remembers a game in Medellin, Colombia, where the opposing team did not want to abide by the rules. Holton ended his basketball career in 1958, due to health concerns. He earned a master's degree in social work at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1967, and went on to have a twenty-nine year career in social services for the State of Wisconsin. He then directed Milwaukee's House of Peace for four years. Holton also describes his family, legacy and hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Holton, Section
A2007_335_001_006, TRT: 0:31:07 2007/11/29

Charles Holton played with the Harlem Globetrotters' southern unit from 1952 to 1958. He describes a challenging game on the East Coast, where they competed against a team that included Gerald Calabrese, Billy Harrell and Sherman White. At this point in the interview, Holton reflects upon his experiences as a member of the Harlem Globetrotters. He also talks about Nathaniel "Sweetwater" Clifton, who went on to play for the New York Knicks; and Mannie Jackson, who owned the team at the time of the interview. Holton had four children, including two adopted daughters from his second marriage. His daughter, actress Lori Holton Nash, played the role of Miss Lori on PBS Kids. Holton describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.