

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Lucy

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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>	Lucy, William, 1933-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 29, 2008 and May 1, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008 and 2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	16 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (7:46:38).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist, labor activist, and union leader William Lucy (1933 - ) was the first African American president of Public Services International. He co-founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and served as the secretary-treasurer of American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Lucy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 29, 2008 and May 1, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_001
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

William Lucy is one of the most prominent labor leaders in recent U.S. history. He has been secretary-treasurer of American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) for the past thirty-five years, and was reelected in July 2008 to another 4-year term. As secretary-treasurer, Lucy holds the second highest ranking position within AFSCME, making him the highest ranking African American in the labor movement.

William Lucy was born on November 26, 1933 in Memphis, Tennessee. Lucy grew up in Richmond, California where his parents, Susie and Joseph Lucy, moved when he was a young boy. He studied civil engineering at the University of California at Berkeley in the early 1950s. Lucy then took a position as an assistant materials and research engineer for Contra Costa County, California. It was in this position that he first got involved in labor organizing. Lucy held that position for thirteen years until 1966. He became a member of AFSCME Local 1675 in 1956 at the age of twenty-three and then was elected its president in 1965 at the age of thirty-two. In 1966, Lucy left his job in civil engineering at Contra Costa County to work full-time for AFSCME's national office in Washington, D.C., as the associate director of the legislation and community affairs departments.

During the 1960s, AFSCME chapters around the country organized marches and strikes to secure better wages and working conditions for its members. These actions were often met with a violent police response. During this period, many AFSCME members and leaders were beaten, tear-gassed, and jailed. Lucy was jailed by police several times in his capacity as union leader and activist. In 1968, at the age of thirty-five, Lucy worked on the historic Memphis sanitation workers' strike. He coined the famous slogan, "I Am A Man!" that became the rallying call for the Memphis strikers. In the tumultuous aftermath of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination during the Memphis sanitation workers' strike, Lucy helped maintain the labor-civil rights-community coalition that sealed the workers' eventual victory and became the model used throughout the nation.

In 1972, Lucy co-founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) to ensure African Americans a voice in labor. In 1984, Lucy joined the Free South Africa Movement, a grassroots campaign that sparked widespread opposition to apartheid in South Africa. In 1994, Lucy became the president of Public Services International (PSI), the world's largest union federation. Lucy was the first African American to hold this position, which coordinates the efforts of ten million members from over 100 nations. Ebony magazine frequently cites Lucy as one of "The 100 most Influential Black Americans." Lucy has two children, Benita Marsh and Phyllis Manuel.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Lucy was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Larry Crowe on January 29, 2008 and May 1, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 16 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights activist, labor activist, and union leader William Lucy (1933 - ) was the first African American president of Public Services International. He co-founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and served as the secretary-treasurer of American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

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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:

Lucy, William, 1933-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Lucy, William, 1933- --Interviews

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African American labor union members--Interviews

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International labor activities--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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Public Services International

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## Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

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Labor Activist

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Union Leader

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 William Lucy, January 29, 2008 and May 1, 2012.  
The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:33 ?

William Lucy was born on November 26, 1933 in Memphis, Tennessee to Susie Gibbs Lucy and Joe Lucy, Sr. His paternal grandparents, Patsy Harris Lucy and James Lucy, were born during the 19th century. Lucy's father was raised in in Thomasville, Alabama, a rural area, where Lucy's uncle owned a large farm. Lucy's mother was born in 1906 in Uniontown, Alabama, where her father died in a coal mining accident. Upon graduating from high school, Lucy's mother moved to Thomasville, where she managed a restaurant. After Lucy's parents married, they moved to Memphis, where his father worked as a laborer for Memphis Light, Gas and Water. Lucy attended the Memphis' segregated LaRose Elementary School. In 1942, his family relocated to Richmond, California, where his father found employment with the U.S. Department of War at the Kaiser Shipyards. In Richmond, Lucy continued his schooling at Nystrom Elementary School, followed by Roosevelt Junior High School. He describes his father's calm and hardworking personality.

African American labor union members--Interviews

International labor activities--Interviews

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:45 ?

William Lucy moved from Memphis, Tennessee to Richmond, California at the onset of World War II, where his father, Joe Lucy, Sr., worked as a journeyman welder at the Kaiser Shipyards, while his mother, Susie Gibbs Lucy, worked as a seamstress and restaurant manager. On Sundays, they attended Richmond's Zion Hill Missionary Baptist Church. Lucy continued his education at Nystrom Elementary School, and Roosevelt Junior High School, where he enjoyed his physical education and history classes. He then attended Richmond High School for two years before transferring to El Cerrito High School in El Cerrito, California in order to play sports, such as football and baseball. Upon graduating in January of 1951, he found employment at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, California, where he started as a dock rigger, and then advanced to the engineering section. He remembers San Francisco Bay Area baseball players Pumpsie Green and Harry Simpson. He also describes the area's music scene.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:39 ?

William Lucy worked on the rigging loft, and in the engineering section of Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, California, after graduating from high school in 1951. Then in 1953, he began his employment with the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, where he worked as an engineering aide in the materials and testing laboratory, which evaluated resources used in the federal

highway program. As a county employee, Lucy was a member of the Contra Costa County Employees Association. In 1956, the association elected to unionize to benefit from union processes and protections, and affiliated with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to become the AFSCME Local 1675. In its early years, the union addressed diverse issues from employee pensions to employer discrimination. Lucy served as chairman of the union's negotiations committee, which represented employees in dealings with Contra Costa County's board of supervisors. In 1966, he became president of AFSCME Local 1675.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:24 ?

William Lucy was a member of the Contra Costa County Employees Association, when it became American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1675 in 1956. Following Jerry Wurf's election as AFSCME national president in 1964, the AFSCME Local 1675 advocated for collective bargaining rights. In 1966, Lucy left the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, and moved to Silver Spring, Maryland to work full time at the national AFSCME office in Washington, D.C. While on assignment in Detroit, Michigan, Lucy learned of brewing unrest in Memphis, Tennessee, where African American sanitation employees were dissatisfied with their labor conditions. At Wurf's insistence, Lucy travelled to Memphis to organize the workers, who were led by T.O. Jones and Robert Beasley. Lucy recalls meeting with Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb, whose disrespect toward the workers strengthened their cause. Lucy describes the disparities between public and private labor sectors; and the preconditions for a strike.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_005, TRT: 5:36:13 ?

William Lucy travelled with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to organize the Memphis Public Works Division employees, who sought to improve their working conditions. In the early days of the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike, city council members Fred Davis, J.O. Patterson, Jr. and James Netters attempted to settle the dispute swiftly but their efforts were rejected by Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb. During a following march, the police department sprayed the crowd with mace, which further encouraged community members, like H. Ralph Jackson and James Lawson. Given his interest in the labor movement, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke multiple times in Memphis, where he delivered his speech, I've Been to the Mountaintop, on April 3, 1968, the day before he was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel. Lucy talks about the Invaders' interest in the strike; and the circumstances of Dr. King's death.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_006, TRT: 6:31:25 ?

William Lucy worked on behalf of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to organize the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike in 1968. In this role, Lucy and Reverend Malcolm Blackburn developed the enduring labor movement slogan, "I Am a Man." After sixty-four days, the strike ended with an agreed upon settlement, which was in part organized by the U.S. undersecretary of labor, James Reynolds. In 1969, Lucy became the assistant to the president of AFSCME, Jerry Wurf; and three years later, was elected as secretary-treasurer of the predominantly-white union. Around this time, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, of which AFSCME was a part, assumed a neutral stance in the presidential race between George McGovern and President Richard Milhous Nixon. When their political concerns were not addressed, Lucy and other union members like Charles Hayes, Cleveland Robinson and Reverend Addie Wyatt

founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_007, TRT: 7:31:36 ?

William Lucy cofounded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in 1972, alongside unionists Reverend Addie Wyatt, Charles Hayes, William Simons, Cleveland Robinson and Nelson “Jack” Edwards. The group was created in response to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization’s neutrality during the 1972 presidential election. While serving as secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Lucy helped organize an economic boycott of South Africa to challenge the South African apartheid regime. Then, in the 1980s, he became a leader of the Free South Africa Movement, which developed as a response to President Ronald Wilson Reagan’s constructive engagement philosophy. Lucy remembers the demonstrations at the South African embassy in Washington, D.C. He also describes the processes that led to the dismantlement of the South African apartheid, and the subsequent release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_008, TRT: 8:29:34 ?

William Lucy served as president of Public Services International, the world’s largest union federation, from 1994 to 2000. In this position, Lucy worked to address labor issues, and to create unions in the public sector worldwide. Following John Sweeney’s election as president of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in 1995, Lucy and eleven others became members of the AFL-CIO’s Executive Council, where Lucy advocated for the concerns of workers of color. While Lucy planned to retire from the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in 2004, he retained his leadership position until 2010. At this point in the interview, Lucy describes his criticism of the Iraq War. He also talks about Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s opposition to public sector unions and his attempt to overhaul the state budget in 2011, which stood to jeopardize the jobs of thousands of state employees.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_009, TRT: 9:28:58 ?

William Lucy and his wife, Dorothea Rader Lucy, were married over forty-seven years, and had three children together. His son, William Lucy, Jr., passed away in 1977. At the time of the interview, his oldest daughter, Benita Lucy Marsh, worked for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, while his youngest daughter, Phyllis Lucy Manuel, was a teacher in Atlanta, Georgia. He talks about the opposition to Governor Scott Walker’s proposed budget reform in the State of Wisconsin, as well as nationwide budget concerns that impact workers in the public sector. Lucy reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes this part of the interview by talking about the legacy of racism in formerly colonized countries.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section A2008\_001\_001\_010, TRT: 10:15:05 ?

William Lucy narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

William Lucy was born on November 26, 1933 in Memphis, Tennessee to Susie Gibbs Lucy and Joe Lucy, Sr. His mother was born in 1906 in Uniontown, Alabama, where her father was killed in a mining accident. His father was born in 1909 in Thomasville, Alabama, where Lucy’s grandfather, James Lucy, worked as a farmer. Lucy grew up in an African American community in Memphis at the time of segregation. Although his family moved frequently, they

lived for several years in Memphis' LeMoyne Gardens once his father was hired at Memphis Light, Gas and Water. Lucy began his education at a Catholic school in Memphis, and then transferred to LaRose Elementary School, a segregated, public school in Memphis. At the onset of World War II, Lucy's family travelled by train to Richmond, California, where his father had found work as a journeyman welder at the Kaiser Shipyards. Lucy attended Richmond's Nystrom Elementary School and Roosevelt Junior High School, where he became interested in architecture.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

William Lucy and his family moved from Memphis, Tennessee to Richmond, California in 1942. There, he grew up in a diverse community near the Kaiser Shipyards, where his father, Joe Lucy, Sr., worked. Lucy attended Richmond's Nystrom Elementary School and Roosevelt Junior High School. After two years at Richmond High School, he transferred to El Cerrito High School in El Cerrito, California, where he played sports and honed his design skills. Upon graduating in 1951, he studied briefly at Contra Costa Junior College in San Pablo, California, before working on the docks at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, California. After a year, he was promoted to the engineering section. In 1953, he became an engineering aide for the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, and joined the Contra Costa County Employees Association, which formally unionized in 1956. He also took engineering courses at the University of California, Berkeley. He describes the industrial unions in Contra Costa County, California.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

William Lucy was a member of the Contra Costa County Employees Association in 1956. At this time, the association joined with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) to form the AFSCME Local 1675. In 1964, Lucy was elected president of AFSCME Local 1675; and under his leadership, AFSCME Local 1675 worked to defeat California Proposition 14, which attempted to reverse the state's fair housing policy. During this period, AFSCME President Jerry Wurf and AFSCME staffers, like CORE founder James Farmer, were instrumental in organizing public sector workers. In 1966, Lucy became associate director of AFSCME's Department of Legislation and Community Affairs, a position for which he relocated to the Washington, D.C. area. Lucy talks about the labor movement in the San Francisco Bay Area, and AFSCME's opposition to the Vietnam War. Lucy also describes his wife, Dorotheria Rader Lucy, and their three children; William Lucy, Jr., Benita Lucy Marsh and Phyllis Lucy Manuel.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

William Lucy moved to Washington, D.C. in 1966, when he joined the Department of Legislation and Community Affairs at the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represented public sector employees in federal policy negotiations. In this role, he worked with Congressmen Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy to address issues faced by employees of the Panama Canal Company, such as low wages. In 1968, he travelled to Memphis, Tennessee, where he organized civic workers who were dissatisfied with their labor conditions and the city's disregard for their union. Lucy and AFSCME members Jesse Epps, Joseph Paisley and P.J. Ciampa facilitated the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike, which lasted for sixty-four days in the spring of 1968. During this period, Lucy and Reverend Malcolm Blackburn created the labor movement slogan, "I Am a Man." Lucy talks about meeting with Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb and Reverend Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

William Lucy and staffers of the Department of Legislation and Community Affairs of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) organized the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis, Tennessee in the spring of 1968. The strikers enlisted the help of leaders like Gilbert E. Patterson of the Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, and H. Ralph Jackson, who became more engaged in the strike after he was maced by the Memphis Police Department during the workers' rights march. Memphis City Council members Jared Blanchard and Lewis Donelson also supported the workers' cause. During the sixty-four day strike, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose Poor People's Campaign addressed workers' rights on a broader scale, spoke on three occasions in Memphis, including on April 3, 1968, when he delivered his famous I've Been to the Mountaintop speech. Lucy talks about the aftermath of workers' rights march in Memphis, and shares his perspective on the assassination of Dr. King.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lucy, Section B2008\_001\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

William Lucy partnered with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to organize a successful workers' rights march in Memphis, Tennessee after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968. The march was attended by forty thousand supporters, and the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike concluded shortly after. At this point in the interview, Lucy talks about the national support for the labor movement. He also recalls Coretta Scott King's response to Dr. King's death; and the impact of Dr. King's death on the City of Washington, D.C. Following the 1972 presidential race between George McGovern and President Richard Milhous Nixon, Lucy and labor leaders Charles Hayes, Nelson "Jack" Edwards and Cleveland Robinson founded the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in 1973, which advocated for African American unionists in various fields. Around this time, Lucy was also elected secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).