

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sala Udin

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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>	Udin, Sala, 1943-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 12, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:27:20).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and city council member Sala Udin (1943 - ) worked for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964 and started the performing arts company, Black Horizons Theatre. Udin has worked in social service agencies, including as executive director at the House of Crossroads, a drug treatment facility and the Multicultural Resource Training Center in San Francisco, and has served as a councilmen for the Sixth District in Pittsburgh. Udin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 12, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_104
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Politician and activist Sala Udin was born Samuel Wesley Howze on February 20, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to William and Mary Howze. Raised in the Hill District of the city, he was one of eleven children. In 1961, Udin graduated from Port Richmond High School in Staten Island, New York and joined the Freedom

Rider campaign that same summer.

Upon his return from the segregated South, Udin served as the president of the State Island Chapter of the NAACP for three years. In 1963, Udin took a group of college students to hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give his “I Have A Dream” speech at the March on Washington. The following year, he worked for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project registering voters in Holmes County. The next year, in 1965, Udin co-founded the Centre Avenue Poets’ Theatre Workshop in his childhood neighborhood of the Hill District with friends and renown playwrights, August Wilson and Rob Penny. By 1967, Udin had become a strong advocate of Black Power attending numerous conferences and started the performing arts company, Black Horizons Theatre, modeled after Amiri Baraka’s Spirit House. Over the next four years, the company produced plays reflective of the Black Arts Movement and used black playwrights such as Sonia Sanchez, Ed Bullins, and Amiri Baraka. The programs were held in the Leo A. Weill School. Additionally, Udin helped to establish a Black Studies program at the University of Pittsburgh and published articles in *The Pittsburgh Courier* entitled, “Afrikan View.”

Beginning in 1968, Udin had numerous run-ins with the law including gun charges and driving without a valid license. In 1970, he was indicted in Louisville, Kentucky for illegal transportation of firearms and possession of distilled spirits. Sentenced to five years at a federal penitentiary, he began serving his sentence at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in 1972. Seven months later, he was paroled. In 2006, he attempted to have his sentence pardoned.

Throughout the mid-1970s, Udin worked in social service agencies including as Executive Director at the House of Crossroads, a drug treatment facility and the Multicultural Resource Training Center in San Francisco. He moved back to Pittsburgh in 1992, and ran for City Council in a special election in 1995. He served as Councilmen for the Sixth District, his childhood neighborhood for ten years. As a councilman, he introduced legislation to establish a Citizen’s Police Review Board and sat on numerous committees including the Plan B Oversight Committee, which helped to provide jobs to women and minorities; the Housing Authority: City of Pittsburgh Board; and the Disparity Study and Implementation Commission.

In 2005, Udin lost in the primary to former employee Tonya Payne. Udin advocates the improvement of the Sixth District and was instrumental in the creation and maintenance of the Freedom Corner, a civil rights monument located in the Hill District neighborhood.

Udin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 12, 2008.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sala Udin was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 12, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and city council member Sala Udin (1943 - ) worked for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964 and started the performing arts company, Black Horizons Theatre. Udin has worked in social service agencies, including as executive director at the House of Crossroads, a drug treatment facility and the Multicultural Resource Training Center in San Francisco, and has served as a councilmen for the Sixth District in Pittsburgh.

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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:**

Udin, Sala, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Udin, Sala, 1943---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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Pittsburgh (Pa.). City Council

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### **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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City Council Member

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### **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|PoliticalMakers

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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 Sala Udin, August 12, 2008. 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).

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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 Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:00 2008/08/12

Sala Udin was born Samuel Wesley Howze on February 20, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was later given the name Sala Udin by a mentor, but did not legally change his name. His mother, Mary Sutton Howze, was born in 1910 in Savannah, Georgia to circuit preacher Richmond Sutton and Amy Royal. Udin believes his

great-grandmother was a Cherokee Indian who married into the family to avoid the Trail of Tears. As a youth, Udin's mother attended Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. before moving to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she met his father, William Howze. Udin's father, who was born in 1909 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi did not share much about his family background. However, Udin believes there is a family connection to HistoryMaker Joseph Howze, Bishop Emeritus of Biloxi, and to residents of Mobile, Alabama's Africatown community. Udin's father worked in a Pittsburgh laundry plant and died at age fifty-one. Udin talks about his family and his earliest memory of childhood in Pittsburgh.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2008/08/12

Sala Udin recalls his childhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the 1950s. He grew up in the Lower Hill District, where Pittsburgh's black population had expanded from the Hill District. The Lower Hill District was rural and many of his neighbors gardened and raised chickens. Udin describes the sights, sounds and smells of his childhood. He attended church and elementary school at Holy Trinity Catholic Church where his mother was employed as a cleaner. Though the Church was predominantly white and Udin was taught by white nuns and brothers, he had some black classmates including playwrights August Wilson and Rob Penny. Udin talks about his childhood sense of humor and a memorable fifth grade teacher, Sister Herman Joseph. He also describes how his values were shaped by church and community. He recalls television and film during his childhood, when few African Americans appeared on TV. In the Hill District, Udin remembers guitarist George Benson performing on Fullerton Street.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 2008/08/12

Sala Udin talks about growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He describes the Hill District, the cultural center of the city's African American community, where 30 to 50 percent of the businesses were black-owned,

including the famous Crawford Grill jazz club. He also talks about the city's two Negro League baseball teams, the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Homestead Grays; and about the city's musicians, including George Benson, Ahmad Jamal, Phyllis Hyman, and Dakota Staton. In the late 1950s, the city's urban renewal efforts forced Udin's family out of the Lower Hill District and into the Bedford Dwellings public housing project. Udin attended Central Catholic High School, but within a year, he was asked to leave due to racial tensions provoked by white students. He enrolled in Schenley High School, but there he and other students from the projects clashed with black students from the affluent Sugar Top community. His grades suffered and in 1959, at age sixteen, he dropped out and ran away to New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/08/12

Sala Udin describes his teenage years and early involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. After dropping out of high school in 1959, he ran away to New York with a few friends. When a friend's father refused to provide housing for Udin in Brooklyn, he moved in with relatives in Staten Island, New York. There, he attended Port Richmond High School, where he was a popular student leader. He recalls seeing Malcolm X speak in high school and describes his increasing engagement with the Civil Rights Movement. Udin joined the Staten Island NAACP Youth Council and participated in the 1963 March on Washington led by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After graduating high school in 1961, Udin studied to be an undertaker at New York City's McAllister Academy of Mortuary Science for a semester. He then decided to assist the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi after hearing Don Hamer of SNCC speak at Wesley Center A.M.E. Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Udin recalls his first experience of the Jim Crow South.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:20 2008/08/12

Sala Udin describes his experience as a civil rights worker in Mississippi. After seeing Don Hamer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) speak in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Udin took a bus south to assist SNCC's efforts. Dropped off in Durant, Mississippi, where the Ku Klux Klan was headquartered, Udin was threatened by a group of local whites while waiting to be picked up by Hamer. He was brought safely into the home of local civil rights leaders, Eugene and Bernice Montgomery, in Lexington, Mississippi where he would stay until 1968. He describes growing ideological differences in the Civil Rights movement during the mid-1960s with the rise of a Black Power philosophy that divided those with a nonviolent approach against those with a more militant approach. Udin reflects on his role as a northern black organizer in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. He describes the role of white northern liberals in the movement and how SNCC trained incoming civil rights workers on safety measures.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:00 2008/08/12

Sala Udin recounts a traumatic experience as a civil rights worker in Mississippi in 1967 and his return to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During a road trip between Jackson and Mt. Beulah, Mississippi, Udin picked up a white female colleague with a disability. Despite his objections and the training they had received from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), she insisted on riding with him in the front seat. They were stopped by the police, who found an illegal pistol Udin brought for self-defense. They beat Udin severely, threatened to summarily execute him, and then jailed him for a night, before he was bailed out. Udin talks about how this incident reflected the cultural disconnect between black and white civil rights workers, and he explains the subsequent expulsion of whites from SNCC and its turn towards a Black Power philosophy. After Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1968 assassination, Udin returned to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to further the cause of Black Power in the urban North.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_007, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/08/12

Sala Udin talks about his involvement with Black Nationalism during the 1970s in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

He describes the fear his parents felt while he was a civil rights worker in Mississippi from 1965 to 1968, and his own developing nationalist philosophy. In Pittsburgh, Udin and colleagues in the Black Power Movement founded the Afro-American Institute to help establish a Black Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, and the House of the Crossroads drug treatment program. He also helped his high school friends playwrights August Wilson and Rob Penney form the Black Horizon Theatre, acting in some of their productions. Udin talks about Amiri Baraka, HistoryMaker Maulana Karenga, and the Congress of African People (CAP), of which he headed the Pittsburgh chapter. He talks about his 1972 arrest for bringing a rifle across state lines, CAP's 1974 ideological transition from cultural nationalism to Marxism-Leninism, and his resignation from CAP in 1977.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_008, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/08/12

Sala Udin recounts his career in the 1980s and 1990s. He describes the decline of the Congress of African People (CAP) in the late 1970s. While some of CAP's projects in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania declined, the Black Horizon Theatre and the House of the Crossroads drug treatment program continued. Udin talks about his first marriage and subsequent divorce. In 1982, he moved to the San Francisco, California to head the Multicultural Training Resource Center (MTRC). In MTRC, Udin raised awareness of AIDS in the African American community, often traveling as a diversity consultant. He describes his disengagement from local politics and his relationship with his sons. In 1992, he returned to Pittsburgh after his mother's death. He then ran for Pittsburgh City Council after the death of his friend Councilman Jake Milliones. Udin lost in 1993 and opened New World Books, an African American bookstore. Elected in 1994, he worked to fight police brutality after attending the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Sala Udin, Section  
A2008\_104\_001\_009, TRT: 0:29:10 2008/08/12

Sala Udin reflects upon his political career and his life. While on the Pittsburgh City Council in Pennsylvania,

Udin expanded civilian oversight of the police, enforced racial equity in municipal contracts, and constructed public housing. In 2005, he decided not to run for mayor and was also defeated in his reelection campaign. Udin became President of the Coro Center for Civic Leadership in 2006. He describes the history of the Coro Center and its focus on training future leaders. Udin talks about his second marriage, what he would do differently, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also talks about his two living sons at the time of interview and the murder of his youngest son. Udin describes his acting experience, the August Wilson Center for African American Culture, and how he would like to be remembered.