

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Bill Lawson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lawson, William A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Bill Lawson,
Dates:	May 11, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:12:22).
Abstract:	Pastor Reverend Bill Lawson (1928 -) was the founding pastor of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church and the namesake of the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace & Prosperity. He was a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement in Houston, Texas. Lawson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 11, 2010, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend William Lawson is a retired pastor and the namesake of an Institute focused on helping the community. He was born on June 28, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri to Walter and Clarisse Lawson. Raised in Kansas City, Kansas, Lawson attended Summer High School and graduated with his B.A. degree from Tennessee A and I state University in 1950. While at Central Baptist Theological Seminary he married Audrey Lawson. He then graduated in 1955 and received his Master of Theology and his Bachelor of Divinity degrees majoring in New Testament Interpretation while holding an appointment as a Teaching Fellow in

Homiletics.

From 1960 to 1970, Lawson served as the director of the Baptist Student Union and a professor of Bible at Texas Southern University. While at Texas Southern University, Lawson helped build the first Afro-American Studies Program at the University of Houston and taught classes in sociology and the Black Church. His involvement with the Civil Rights Movement began when fourteen TSU students held a sit-in protesting segregation at a lunch counter. After founding the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, Lawson invited the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to speak at his church in 1963. Lawson served as a pastor for over thirty years. In honor of his dedication to the community, the community created a non-profit organization called the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace and Prosperity. Through the organization, Lawson brought attention to the oldest African American cemetery in Houston, helped create The Main Street Coalition, and founded the WALIPP Preparatory Academy for boys. The Academy was the first charter school created for boys grades six through eight in the U.S. The Institute also houses a Seniors Residence for independent-living adults.

Lawson headed the Houston chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for over three decades. In 1968, he received his honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Howard Payne University and in 1993 he received his honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University of Houston. For his outstanding work with the Boy Scouts and his organization of the area's largest scouting program, in 1991 Lawson was given the Silver Beaver Award. Lawson is also the author of *Lawson's Leaves of Love: Daily Meditations*, published in 2004.

William A. Lawson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 11, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Bill Lawson was conducted by Denise Gines on May 11, 2010, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Pastor Reverend Bill Lawson (1928 -) was the founding pastor of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church and the namesake of the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace & Prosperity. He was a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement in Houston, Texas.

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:

Lawson, William A.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lawson, William A.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Reverend Bill Lawson, May 11, 2010. 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 Reverend Bill Lawson, Section A2010_010_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Reverend Bill Lawson was born on June 28, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri to Clarisse Riggs Cade and William Lawson. His mother was born in 1905 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and moved as a young adult to St. Louis, where she met and married Lawson's father. They divorced shortly after Lawson's birth, and he was raised by his mother in the home of his maternal grandfather, railroad worker Charles Riggs. Although his mother had little formal education, she found work as a secretary at an insurance company, and enrolled Lawson at Frederick Douglass Elementary School, where he was mentored by his teacher, Juanita Wallace. When he was twelve years old, his mother married Walter Cade, Sr., who had two children from a previous marriage, Cathryn Cade Cruitt and Walter Cade, Jr. The family then moved to Kansas City, Kansas, where Lawson's stepfather worked as a chauffeur and cook. Lawson enrolled at Kansas City's Northeast Junior High School, and joined the congregation of the Eighth Street Baptist Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Bill Lawson, Section A2010_010_001_002, TRT: 0:30:49 ?

Reverend Bill Lawson attended the Eighth Street Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kansas alongside his mother and stepfather, Clarisee Riggs Cade and Walter Cade, Sr. At the church, Lawson was eventually called to the ministry, and gave his first sermon. During this time, Lawson also aspired to become a cartoonist, and was encouraged by Esquire magazine's E. Simms Campbell to pursue a career

in New York City. However, following his high school graduation, Lawson matriculated at the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in Nashville. There, he majored in sociology, and joined the student council and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. Lawson went on to study at the Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas, and briefly pastored a small church in Pittsburg, Kansas. Then, he moved to Houston, Texas, where he was hired as a bible teacher and student chaplain at Texas Southern University. Lawson also remembers meeting his wife, Audrey Hoffman Lawson.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Bill Lawson, Section A2010_010_001_003, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

Reverend Bill Lawson served as chaplain at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, where he was inspired by the activism of his students. In 1962, he founded Houston's Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church; and, following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he led a march against school segregation in Houston. Around that time, Lawson hosted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, and founded an SCLC chapter at Dr. King's request. Lawson also established Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, and developed the church's religious education programs. He worked with the Houston Area Urban League and Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston; and, through the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace and Prosperity (WALIPP), established a middle school for boys. Lawson talks about his activism at the time of the interview, including his advocacy for the creation of a public defender office in Harris County, Texas, and his protests against the termination of public school food workers.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Bill Lawson, Section A2010_010_001_004, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

Reverend Bill Lawson was called to the ministry at sixteen years old. Although he was initially reluctant to become a pastor, he went on to found the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church and the William A. Lawson Institute for Peace and Prosperity (WALIPP) in Houston, Texas. With his wife, Audrey Hoffman Lawson, Lawson had four children: news anchor Melanie Lawson; WALIPP

executive director Cheryl Lawson; teacher Eric Lawson; and Roxanne Lawson, who worked for the City of Houston's Housing and Community Development Department. He also had two granddaughters, Robyn Troup and Raven Troup, both of whom aspired to careers in entertainment. Lawson talks about his spiritual philosophy, as well as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's role in the Civil Rights Movement. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, and concludes this part of the interview by sharing a message to future generations.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Bill Lawson, Section A2010_010_001_005, TRT: 0:16:04 ?

Reverend Bill Lawson narrates his photographs.