

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dori Wilson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilson, Dori, 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson,
Dates:	July 16, 2017 and May 25, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010 and 2017
Physical Description:	11 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:03:06).
Abstract:	Public relations executive and model Dori Wilson (1943 - 2021) was the founder of Dori Wilson Public Relations and the first African American runway model in Chicago, Illinois. Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 16, 2017 and May 25, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_029
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Publicist and model Dori Wilson was born in Winona, Mississippi. At the age of seven, Wilson moved to Chicago, Illinois. She attended Farren School, Shakespeare Elementary School, and Hyde Park High School. She continued her education at Roosevelt University, where she graduated with her B.A. degree.

Upon her graduation from Hyde Park High School, Wilson began working for Goldblatt's in the Accounts Payable Adjusting Department in 1961. Wilson then moved to Compton Advertising, Inc., where she worked as a secretary and assistant producer. She also started her part-time modeling career and became the first African American runway model in Chicago, Illinois in 1964. Wilson began her modeling career by working for Marshall Field & CO. and Carson Pirie Scott. In 1968, Wilson joined Foote, Cone & Belding and on their advertising project with Sears, Roebuck & Co. During the project, she also worked as a model and instructor at Sears, Roebuck, and Co. Charm School. She was promoted in 1970 to director of fashion and casting at Foote, Cone & Belding, where she cast models and helped producers during shoots. During this time, she continued to model and starred in numerous fashion shows, advertisements, and events, including Gucci's Fall 1970 campaign and the Dress Horsemen and Trophy Board Annual Benefit Fashion Spectacular in 1975. In 1980, Wilson began her successful entrepreneurial career with the opening of Dori Wilson Public Relations, a firm whose clients have included the City of Chicago, Tiffany & Co., and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. The following year, Wilson helped form The Chicago Academy for the Arts. Wilson has been a member of the Girl Scouts of Chicago's Association Board for over thirty years. She has also been listed in *Who's Who Among Black Americans* and in Donna Ballard's book, *Doing It For Ourselves: Success Stories of African American Women in Business*, which was published in 1997. In 2008, she was honored in an evening of recognition at the Stanley Paul/Raelene Mittelman Scholarship Benefit.

Wilson lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Dori Wilson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 25, 2010 and July 16, 2017.

Wilson passed away on February 1, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dori Wilson was conducted by Gwendolyn Quinn and Larry Crowe on July 16, 2017 and May 25, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 11 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Public relations executive and model Dori Wilson (1943 - 2021) was the founder of Dori Wilson Public Relations and the first African American runway model in Chicago, Illinois.

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:

Wilson, Dori, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Quinn, Gwendolyn (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Dori, 1943- --Interviews

Models (Persons)--United States.

Public relations firms--Illinois.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Fashion Model

Public Relations Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers|StyleMakers

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 Dori Wilson, July 16, 2017 and May 25, 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 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).

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 Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_001_001, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Dori Wilson was born on October 15, 1943 in Winona, Mississippi to Fannie Brown Wilson and William Wilson, Sr. Wilson's maternal grandparents both died when her mother was a young girl. Her grandfather was killed for smiling at a white woman, and her grandmother died of pneumonia. Wilson's father was born in Arkansas to a Native American father and African American mother. He began working at a young age for the Works Progress Administration, and eventually moved to Winona, where he met his first wife, Zelma Palmer, and later Wilson's mother. Wilson's father left to find work in Chicago, Illinois shortly before her birth; and, when she was six years old, her family was reunited in Highland Park, Illinois. There, Wilson's mother worked as a domestic for Mary Lou Guckenheimer. The family lived briefly in Ossining, New York, and returned to Chicago upon the birth of Wilson's brother, William Wilson, Jr. Wilson attended Chicago's John Farren Elementary School, Shakespeare School and Hyde Park High School.

African American families--Mississippi--Winona.

Education, Secondary--Social aspects.

Hyde Park High School (Chicago, Ill.)

Sewing.

Clothing and dress.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_001_002, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Dori Wilson attended Hyde Park High School in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating, she worked as a secretary in the accounts payable department of Chicago's Goldblatts department store. Then, Wilson began her career in the advertising industry at Compton Advertising, Inc., where she was the assistant to producer Shepp Chartok. At a casting call, Wilson was approached by noted talent agent Shirley Hamilton about becoming a fashion model. From that time, Wilson was one of the few dark skinned models to walk in runway shows for prominent companies like the Chicago Auto Show, Marshall Field and Company and other majority designers in Chicago. Wilson also appeared as a contestant on 'The Dating Game,' where she was selected by H. B. Barnum to win a trip to Europe. In 1968, Wilson was recruited by Albert P. Weisman to become the casting and fashion director for the Foote, Cone and Belding advertising agency. While there, Wilson continued to model, and hosted the 'Memorandum' talk show on WMAQ-TV.

Compton Advertising, inc.

Marshall Field's (Department store)

Fashion models--1960-1970.

Models (Persons)--United States.

Foote Cone & Belding.

Television talk shows--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_001_003, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Dori Wilson appeared on television as a guest host of 'The Lee Phillip Show' and as the host of her own show, 'Memorandum,' on WMAQ-TV in Chicago, Illinois. At the same time, she was the casting and fashion director of the Foote, Cone and Belding advertising agency. Then, in the late 1970s, Wilson decided to

found the Dori Wilson Public Relations firm. She encountered discrimination while recruiting clients and funding, but eventually developed a successful and well known public relations firm that represented companies and organizations like the Mannequin Guild, for which she organized a gala at Chicago's Playboy Mansion; the Chicago International Film Festival; The HistoryMakers; and the film premier of 'The Color Purple,' which starred Oprah Winfrey. Wilson met Winfrey upon her arrival in Chicago, and introduced Winfrey to her future agent, Jeffrey D. Jacobs. Wilson also worked for political candidates like Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and President Barack Obama.

Foote Cone & Belding.

New business enterprises.

Public Relations--Illinois--Chicago.

Winfrey, Oprah.

Public relations and politics.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_001_004, TRT: 0:18:06 ?

Dori Wilson talks about her career plans, and the future of the Dori Wilson Public Relations firm. She also reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered. Wilson describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes this part of the interview by narrating her photographs.

High School dropouts--Illinois--Chicago.

Youth and violence--Illinois--Chicago.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_005, TRT: 5:29:32 ?

Dori Wilson's maternal grandfather was murdered in reprisal for looking at a white woman on the street in Winona, Mississippi, and her grandmother died of pneumonia. After losing both their parents, Wilson's mother and aunt, Fannie Brown Wilson and Dorothy Brown Simpson, were raised by their grandmother, Bettie Brown, and other relatives in Winona. Wilson's father, William Wilson, Sr., was born in Uniontown, Arkansas; and, at the age of fourteen years old, left home to build railroads with the Works Progress Administration. He eventually moved to Winona, where he had several children with his first wife, Zelma Palmer, before meeting Wilson's mother. Prior to Wilson's birth, her father left to find work in Chicago, Illinois, while her mother remained in Winona, where she worked as a domestic for the Burns family. Wilson's family reunited in Illinois when she was seven years old. There, her mother worked in the household of Mary Lou Guckenheimer, who was a white member of the NAACP and CORE.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_006, TRT: 6:28:39 ?

Dori Wilson's mother worked as a domestic for Mary Lou Guckenheimer in Highland Park, Illinois, and followed Guckenheimer when she relocated to Ossining, New York. Shortly after moving to Ossining, Wilson's mother became pregnant with Wilson's brother, William Wilson, Jr., and the family returned to Chicago, Illinois. During elementary school, Wilson was bullied for her speaking style, which was influenced by her experiences among wealthy whites. Wilson later attended Chicago's Hyde Park High School, and worked after class as a saleswoman at the local F.W. Woolworth Company store. After graduating, she was briefly employed in the accounts payable department of Goldblatts, before accepting an assistantship at Compton Advertising, Inc. While accompanying producer Shepp Chartok to a casting call, Wilson was discovered by talent agent Shirley Hamilton, and began a second career as a fashion model.

She eventually became the model for the first black mannequin at the Marshall Field and Company department store.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_007, TRT: 7:29:31 ?

Dori Wilson joined the advertising industry in 1965, when she became an assistant at Compton Advertising, Inc. There, she learned about commercial production and general marketing, at a time when advertisers targeted white audiences rather than African American consumers. Wilson also encountered racial discrimination through her second career as a fashion model; although, in this industry, she faced the most discrimination from African American designers, who refused to hire her because of her dark skin. As a result, Wilson mostly modeled for majority companies. She was photographed in Chicago's wealthy, white Gold Coast and River North neighborhoods, and met notable Chicagoans such as Hugh Hefner, Potter Palmer IV and Victor Skrebneski at venues like Maxim's lounge. In the late 1970s, Wilson left the advertising industry to establish the Dori Wilson Public Relations firm, although she lacked formal training in the profession. She continued to work as a model during her transition to public relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_008, TRT: 8:30:26 ?

Dori Wilson was a notable runway model and socialite in Chicago, Illinois during the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, Wilson's acquaintances included media moguls, advertisers and entrepreneurs such as Irv Kupcinec and Essee Kupcinec, Thomas J. Burrell, Leigh Jones and Barbara Gardner Proctor. While modeling, Wilson began working under John O'Toole and Albert P. Weisman as the fashion and casting director at the Foote, Cone and Belding advertising office in Chicago's River North area. After fourteen years, Wilson left Foote, Cone and Belding to found the Dori Wilson Public Relations firms with loans from her friends and the Small Business Administration. She obtained an office space in Water Tower Place, and secured contracts for events like the opening of the Harold Washington Library Center and the History Makers Awards at the DuSable Museum of African American History. Through her work, Wilson was introduced to Oprah Winfrey, and became her friend and advisor.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_009, TRT: 9:30:30 ?

Dori Wilson first heard about television personality Oprah Winfrey while hosting the 'Memorandum' talks show on WMAQ-TV in Chicago, Illinois. Soon after, the two women met and became friends. Wilson introduced Winfrey to her future manager, Jeffrey D. Jacobs; appeared alongside her at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition; and organized the premiere of Winfrey's film, 'The Color Purple.' Wilson talks about the importance of networking in the public relations (PR) industry, and explains how her relationships with Winfrey and other notables contributed to the Dori Wilson Public Relations firm. She also remembers the firm's early challenges, when she struggled to find clients in the majority-white PR industry. Outside of work, Wilson served on the boards of several civic organizations, including the Chicago International Film Festival, PAWS Chicago and the Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance. Wilson reflects upon her career in public relations, and the racial segregation of Chicago's neighborhoods.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_010, TRT: 10:31:27 ?

Dori Wilson was the owner of the Dori Wilson Public Relations firm in Chicago, Illinois. Her clients included the Chicago Public Schools and the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development. Under Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne, Wilson helped develop the Apparel Industry Board, which worked to promote Chicago's fashion and garment industries. She talks about the

difference between the fashion industries in Chicago and New York City, and the roles of fashion director Nena Ivon and makeup designer Marilyn Miglin. Wilson also served on the board of several organizations, including the Chicago Academy for the Arts, the Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance and the Lawson House YMCA. Although Wilson did not have biological children, she raised her nephew, Travis Wilson, from the age of ten years old. She talks about the challenges of parenthood, and describes her hopes and concerns for Chicago and her plans for the future of Dori Wilson Public Relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Dori Wilson, Section A2010_029_002_011, TRT: 11:15:26 ?

Dori Wilson met her mentor and friend, Ann Dibble Jordan, through a mutual friend in Chicago, Illinois. Wilson often turned to Dibble Jordan for advice; and, through her guidance, became involved in Black Creativity, an exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry that highlighted the contributions of African American scientists and artists. In addition to Black Creativity, Wilson also served on the board of Columbia College Chicago during the tenure of President Mirron Alexandroff. Wilson reflects upon the changes in Chicago, and describes her hopes and concerns for the city's African American community. She concludes the interview by reflecting upon her life and legacy.