Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Albert N. Thompson

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Thompson, Albert N.

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Albert N. Thompson,

Dates: March 20, 2012

Bulk Dates: 2012

Physical Description: 5 MOV HD video files (2:05:02).

Abstract: Chemistry professor and chemist Albert N. Thompson (1946 - ) is chair of Spelman College’s Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. He has garnered several research grants from prestigious organizations in the field of porphyrin chemistry such as the National Science Foundation. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 20, 2012, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2012_072

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chemist and chemistry professor Albert N. Thompson, Jr. was born October 31, 1946 to Martha Furgess Thompson and Albert Thompson, Sr. in Columbia, South Carolina, (Richland County). His mother was an elementary school teacher and his father was a college professor. After attending Savannah Kay Elementary and William Miller Jr. High Schools, Thompson attended and graduated from Phillis Wheatley, Sr. High School in Houston, Texas in 1964. He received his B.S. degree in chemistry and his M.S. degree in inorganic chemistry from Texas Southern University in 1973 and 1975, respectively. Thompson served as an instructor of physical science and chemistry at Houston Community College and Texas Southern University between 1974 and 1975. He earned his Ph.D. degree in inorganic chemistry from Howard University in 1979. He then became an assistant professor of chemistry at Fisk University.

Thompson served as an assistant professor of chemistry at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina. In 1981, he did a faculty research fellowship at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base, Texas before being hired as a professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Thompson served as a visiting professor of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1990. In 2011, Thompson earned a promotion to chair Spelman College’s Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics.

Thompson has received funding and co-funding from several research and educational grants from organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), United States Air Force, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Department of Energy and the United States Army. Thompson has also served as a research and program proposal consultant to the NSF, NASA, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NIH, Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) and Project Kaleidoscope organizations. A member of the University of Chicago James Franck Institute NSF Materials Research Center Visiting Advisory Committee, Thompson is an advocate for minority student training in science and research careers. He organized
and is involved with the American Chemical Society’s sponsored summer research program for Atlanta area high school students, Project SEED.

Thompson is a member of the American Chemical Society Beta Kappa Chi Scientific Honor Society and the Sigma Pi Sigma Physics Honor Society. He was also featured in an Ebony magazine article on Spelman College. In 2011, he received a distinguished alumni award from the School of Science and Technology at Texas Southern University. Thompson has two children, Amber and Tayloir. He resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

Albert N. Thompson, Jr. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 20, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Albert N. Thompson was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 20, 2012, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 MOV HD video files. Chemistry professor and chemist Albert N. Thompson (1946 - ) is chair of Spelman College’s Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. He has garnered several research grants from prestigious organizations in the field of porphyrin chemistry such as the National Science Foundation.

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:

Thompson, Albert N.
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)
**Subjects:**

- African Americans--Interviews
- Thompson, Albert N.--Interviews
- African American chemists--Interviews.

**Organizations:**

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- Spelman College

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

- EducationMakers
- ScienceMakers

**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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 7/24/2013 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, March 20, 2012

Albert Nelson Thompson Jr. slates his interview and shares his favorites. Thompson’s maternal and paternal families are originally from South Carolina. Several on Thompson’s maternal and paternal sides were well-educated, and many also worked as educators in and around Columbia, SC, and for Thompson’s parents, in Houston, TX. In fact, Thompson’s parents met through education while both were teachers at Booker T. Washington Heights Elementary School in Columbia, and then both went on to long careers as educators. Thompson is the oldest, and has a younger sister and brother. Thompson’s father was an outspoken person and particularly interested in advancing African Americans’ rights. For example, he filed and won a lawsuit regarding unequal pay, working with the NAACP and having among his representation Thurgood Marshall. Such activism eventually led Thompson’s family to leave South Carolina; his parents could no longer find employment there, possibly due to the father’s membership in the NAACP. Thompson’s family’s move to Houston, TX for his father’s new job at Texas Southern University is one of Thompson’s earliest childhood memories and shaped the rest of his childhood. As part of TSU’s campus life the family was able to take advantage the cultural events, notable leaders and other resources that were part of the university in ways they could not have elsewhere in the segregated South.

African American families--South Carolina.
African American parents--Education.
African American Universities and colleges--Alumni and alumnae.
College teaching.
Texas Southern University.

Thompson walks through his early education in Texas, starting with Blackshear and Savannah Georgia Kay elementary schools, then William Miller Junior High School and Phillis Wheatley High School. Thompson began to realize his love for science by the 6th grade, thanks to the opportunity to lead a project and the encouragement of his classroom teacher. By high school he’d learned that although he didn’t care for Biology, he had a great affinity for Chemistry and its mathematics and problem-solving; he enjoyed and performed well in Physics also. Through a series of fortunate meetings, encouragement and mentoring by notable scientists and science instructors – particularly Dr. Ray Wilson, Edward Book and Dr. Joseph Morris – Thompson advanced his scientific study, earning a B.S. and M.S. from Howard University. His Bachelor’s was from Texas Southern University, although he earned several of his early credits toward that degree at West Virginia State and Prairie View universities, before he served more than two years in the Army prior to returning to finish at TSU.

Scientific ability in children.
African Americans--Education.
Thompson explains his doctoral work in inorganic chemistry at Howard University, including his dissertation on water-soluble porphyrins. This research was significant to the field in part because water-soluble porphyrins can be ingested or injected into the body to enable more localized, less toxic cancer treatments compared to traditional cancer drugs. Thompson also described what his days were like as a graduate student and how he juggled the demands of research and teaching. Thompson then recounts how at the time he was graduating in 1978 he had to decide what career track and institution he wanted to join to start his post-graduate career. He knew he wanted to go into teaching rather than working in the industry, and ultimately chose to start at Fisk University. However, Thompson eventually left Fisk after two years to pursue other opportunities; next he went to Fayetteville State, and then finally to Spelman College in 1981, where he has spent the majority of his career. Thompson describes several of the factors that went into each of his decisions and ultimate moves. One of the most compelling factors for Thompson was the fact that Spelman had begun to build its reputation in the sciences significantly, marshalling resources and producing many successful science graduates. Since joining Spelman Thompson has contributed significantly to its instutional and alumnae success. Among his accomplishments and leadership roles, he was chair of the chemistry department from 1992 to 1998. During his chairmanship he also ran a large grant from NASA’s Model Institutions for Excellence program – a competitive program for which he helped develop the proposal that eventually brought its students approximately $1,000,000 a year in scholarships, research opportunities, post-docs, and facility renovations for eleven consecutive years.
Spelman College--College department heads.
Spelman College--Curricula.
Mentoring in science.
Fathers and daughters.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert N. Thompson, Section A2012_072_001_005, TRT: 5:10:26 2012/03/20

Albert Thompson describes his photos.
Photograph collections.