

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Tillman, Dorothy, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman,
Dates:	September 5, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:20).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and city alderman The Honorable Dorothy Tillman (1947 -) started her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement at the age of sixteen as a trainee and a field staff organizer for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Tillman is a reparations activist and former Chicago alderman. Tillman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 5, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_178
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist and former city alderman Dorothy Wright Tillman was born on May 12, 1947 in Montgomery, Alabama, and joined the Civil Rights Movement at the age of sixteen.

As a trainee and a field staff organizer with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) she fought for equality and political consciousness. She helped Dr. King organize in Chicago, where she met her future husband and father of her children, Jimmy Lee Tillman. She also participated in the march on the Edmund-Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. This march, later known as Bloody Sunday, was a turning point in the battle to insure the right to vote for African American citizens.

Tillman and her husband Jimmy moved to San Francisco soon after they were married, where she successfully mobilized residents in her public housing community in a battle for local public transportation. After the family moved back to Chicago, Tillman organized a group of concerned parents and fought for quality education in their community. She founded the Parent Equalizers of Chicago, with over 300 schools participating. This set the groundwork for school reform in Chicago.

In 1985, Tillman became the first woman to serve as alderman of Chicago's Third Ward. As a major political figure in Chicago, she has been highly involved in numerous community-building activities, including projects related to issues of inner-city education, housing and homelessness. Tillman has also been an influential player in the movement for slave reparations. She has received numerous awards and recognition for her local, national and global activism and has been featured in various books and television features.

Dorothy Tillman was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 5, 2002.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman was conducted by Adele Hodge on September 5, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and city alderman The Honorable Dorothy Tillman (1947 -) started her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement at the age of sixteen as a trainee and a field staff organizer for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Tillman is a reparations activist and former Chicago alderman.

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:

Tillman, Dorothy, 1947-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Tillman, Dorothy, 1947---Interviews

Women city council members--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Chicago (Ill.)

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

City Alderman

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable Dorothy Tillman, September 5, 2002. 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 The Honorable Dorothy Tillman, Section A2002_178_001_001, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Dorothy Tillman talks about her family background. Tillman was born on May 12, 1947. Her maternal grandmother, Julia Lee White, was from Montgomery, Alabama, and Tillman was very close to her. Tillman spent more time with her grandmother than her mother, because her mother was still a teenager. Although she did not know her paternal grandparents, Tillman remembers her Aunt Mabel, who raised her father. She was also very close to her paternal great grandmother who was named "Mama Dean." Tillman was an active, inquisitive child. As a child, Tillman did not understand why she had to sit in the back of the bus. In elementary and high school, most of her teachers were dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement and encouraged the students and their families to participate. Tillman remembers the first time she heard Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Hope Street Baptist Church as well as her family's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. She marched with Dr. King and was a field organizer.

African American families--Alabama.

African American students--Education (elementary)--Alabama.

African American students--Education (secondary)--Alabama.

Segregation--Alabama.

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Montgomery--History--20th century.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman, Section A2002_178_001_002, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Dorothy Tillman shares happy childhood memories of dancing, fish fries, parties, and church. Later, as a student member of SCLC, she studied under Dr. James Bevel and was part of the Direct Action team. Tillman was one of the first ten assigned to Selma, Alabama where she participated in the Selma march on March 7, 1965 when police beat marchers as soon as they arrived at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. As soon as the violence started, the marchers scattered and some of the civil rights leaders were severely beaten or died. That night, James Bevel preached and his words erased the fear and anger of the protesters, despite the white gangs that waited across the street from the church. Tillman moved to Chicago, Illinois when she was seventeen years old with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC. Dr. King was uncomfortable being in Chicago, so the field staff stayed with him for his entire trip. African American ministers and politicians did not want the SCLC in Chicago creating a tense environment. Civil rights movements--Alabama--Selma--History--20th century.

African Americans--Crimes against.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Selma-Montgomery Rights March, 1965.

African Americans--Civil rights--Alabama--Selma--History--20th century.

Civil rights movements--Illinois--Chicago.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman, Section A2002_178_001_003,

TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Dorothy Tillman describes her political career in Chicago, Illinois. Despite the treatment she received in Chicago, Tillman was assigned to organize the housing projects as part of her work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1965. Reverend Jesse Jackson became part of the SCLC Chicago staff in 1966, and Tillman describes the differences between the whites in the south and the north. Tillman remembers that Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Elijah Muhammad and the different approaches within the Civil Rights Movement. Tillman then talks about campaigning for alderman in 1985, her experiences in City Hall, the movement that elected Mayor Harold Washington as Chicago mayor, and how hats became her trademark. As alderman of Chicago's third ward, Tillman instituted the 70-30 plan to ensure that 70% of contracts were given to African American developers. Tillman married blues musician and playwright Jimmy Tillman in 1965 and is the mother of five children.

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Mayors--Illinois--Chicago--Election.

African Americans--Crimes against.

Civil rights movements--Illinois--Chicago.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference--History.

Chicago (Ill.)--Politics and government.

Hats.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Dorothy Tillman, Section A2002_178_001_004,
TRT: 0:26:58 ?

Dorothy Tillman describes the steps she took to advance the reparations movement and comments on how the African American community is divided on the issue. While the academic community has constant discussions about slavery, Tillman feels that African Americans have not taken up the fight for economic justice and African American politicians need to fight for African American empowerment. Tillman recalls the first hearing on slavery and reparations held in Chicago in 2000, and how Alderman Edward M. Burke supported her efforts. Tillman's legacy is her care for her people and motherhood as her greatest accomplishment. Tillman believes that she will be remembered for her trademark hats. She concludes by narrating her photographs.

African Americans--Reparations.

Compensation (Law)--United States.

African Americans--Civil rights.

African Americans--Reparations.