

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leonard Dawson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dawson, Leonard Ervin, 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Dawson,
Dates:	November 13, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:54:16).
Abstract:	Academic administrator and education consultant Leonard Dawson (1934 -) is the former president of Voorhees College. Dawson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_265
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educational consultant and former college president Leonard E. Dawson was born on February 5, 1934, in Augusta, Georgia. His parents, through hard work, managed to send all five of their children to college on a modest income. Dawson first attended Morris Brown College in Atlanta, where he earned a B.A. in English in 1954. He would later earn an M.A. in guidance and counseling from Columbia University in 1961 and an Ed.D. from George Washington University with a focus on counselor education in 1974.

Following his graduation from Morris Brown College, Dawson found a job teaching at Carver High School in Hamilton, Georgia, and in 1956 he joined the U.S. Army. Following an honorable discharge, Dawson returned to teaching, and by 1964, he was the head counselor at Johnson Junior High School in his hometown of Augusta. In 1967, Dawson joined the staff of Paine College, where he became the dean of academics in 1969. He went to work for the United States Department of Education in 1970, and the following year he became a senior program officer at the R.R. Moten Memorial Institute, working extensively with the federal government and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Dawson became the executive vice president of the Moten Institute in 1977, and in 1980, he left to become the director of special projects for the United Negro College Fund. In 1985, Dawson was named president of Voorhees College, where he served until retiring in 2001. While at Voorhees, Dawson worked to erase a massive deficit along with doubling the size of Voorhees' student enrollment. In 2001, Dawson was named a senior consultant to the White House Initiative on HBCUs.

Dawson is active in a number of professional and civic organizations, including the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, the National Education Association and the Third Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2001, he was awarded the Order of the Palmetto, the highest civilian honor in the state, by the governor of South Carolina.

Dawson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 13, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Leonard Dawson was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator and education consultant Leonard Dawson (1934 -) is the former president of Voorhees College.

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:

Dawson, Leonard Ervin, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dawson, Leonard Ervin, 1934---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

College President

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Leonard Dawson, November 13, 2003. 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 Leonard Dawson, Section A2003_265_001_001, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Leonard Dawson was born on February 5, 1934 in Augusta, Georgia. His paternal grandfather changed the family name from Wicker, a slave owner in Norwood, Georgia, to Dawson after purchasing his freedom. Both Dawson's parents, Mary Belle Smith-Dawson and Horace Dawson, were born in Norwood, Georgia. They migrated to Augusta after Horace Dawson was discharged from the U.S. Army following World War I. He worked for the Railway Express Agency his entire working life. He made less than \$6000 a year and was able to send all five of his children to college. Dawson's mother was a homemaker and for a time, sold cosmetics from their home. Dawson describes his older siblings

and his own mischievous childhood personality. While growing up, Dawson attended an A.M.E. church with his father and siblings while his mother attended a Baptist church. Dawson describes his segregated childhood community in Augusta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Dawson, Section A2003_265_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Leonard Dawson talks about R&B musician James Brown, whom he grew up with in Augusta, Georgia. Dawson describes the black community in Augusta, local civil rights activity, and talks about the educational opportunities available to black children in Augusta. He attended Charles T. Walker Elementary School and then continued to high school at the Haines Institute, a local boarding school for African Americans as there was no public high school for black students in the area at the time. Dawson talks about the history of Haines and his time as a commuter student there. After his junior year, Haines merged with a public school in Augusta, and Dawson was a graduate of the first class in 1950. He recalls his interests and influential teachers at Haines. Dawson attended Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia on a scholarship from his pastor and worked at Lockheed Martin while in school. Dawson concludes by talking about his professors at Morris Brown College.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Dawson, Section A2003_265_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Leonard Dawson earned his B.A. degree in English from Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1954. He taught English for two years before being drafted into the U.S. Army in 1956 and then he returned to teaching after his discharge. Dawson earned his M.A. degree in counseling from Columbia University in New York in 1961. He explains that southern schools routinely paid for black students to study in the North to preserve segregation. Dawson returned to Augusta, Georgia and worked in the Augusta public school system and in the Upward Bound program at Paine College. He was promoted to regional director and, while working, enrolled in a Ph.D. program at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Dawson began working at the Robert R. Moton Memorial Institute in 1972 and earned his Ed.D. degree in 1974. He joined the United Negro College Fund, UNCF, as director of special projects in the late 1970s and went to Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina as president in 1985.

Video Oral History Interview with Leonard Dawson, Section A2003_265_001_004, TRT: 0:25:10 ?

Leonard Dawson describes the situation at Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina when he became the school's president in 1985. The college was deeply in debt, enrollment had plummeted, and the campus was in disrepair. Dawson explains his plan to ensure that the school could become financially solvent. He also talks about renovating the campus and increasing enrollment and the importance of the college to the surrounding community. In 2001, Dawson retired and was asked to work with the White House Initiative for the U. S. Department of Education for Historically Black Colleges and Universities as a program specialist. He describes his job functions and the work of fellow HistoryMaker Dr. Louis Sullivan with the Initiative. Dawson reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, as well as his life, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.