

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Herman "Skip" Mason

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Mason, Herman
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason,
Dates:	June 20, 2011
Bulk Dates:	2011
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:56:52).
Abstract:	Archivist Herman "Skip" Mason (1962 -) served as the 33rd general president of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the college archivist at Morris Brown College and Morehouse College. Mason was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 20, 2011, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2011_037
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend and historian Herman ‘Skip’ Mason was born on July 14, 1962 in Atlanta, Georgia to Herman ‘Pop’ Mason and Deloris Hughes. At the age of fourteen, Mason read Alex Haley’s *Roots* and was inspired to research and document the history of African American people. In 1980, Mason graduated from Therrell High School in Atlanta, Georgia and enrolled at Morris Brown College in Atlanta. In 1982, Mason realized his life-long goal by being initiated into the Iota Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated on the anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. That same year, he became president of the chapter and during his tenure the fraternity was named Georgia College Chapter of the Year. After graduating college in 1984 with his B.A. degree in communications and history, Mason joined the Eta Lambda chapter and became the chapter’s historian in 1985. In 1989, Mason received his M.S. degree in library and information science with a concentration in African American history from Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta and was awarded his certification in archival studies from the Archives Institute of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library. Mason later studied at the Phillips School of Theology in Atlanta.

Mason began his career by working at the Herndon Home Museum in Atlanta during his junior year of college as a historian where he interpreted the history of the Herndon Family and the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. In 1986, he worked for the U.S. Department of Interior interpreting the historical significance of the Martin Luther King family with the King Center Library and Archives. From 1987 to 1992, Mason worked for the Atlanta Fulton Public Library as the black studies librarian and archivist for the Special Collections Department. His work with the library involved developing strategies for identification and procurement of archival collections on African Americans in Atlanta, the state of Georgia and the Southeast region. During this period, Mason became the first national archivist for Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated and helped to facilitate the transfer of its archives to the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. In 1992, Mason founded Digging It Up, a full scale African American research and consulting firm which he later renamed Skip Mason’s Archives in 1998. Mason also became the pastor of Greater Hopewell Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlanta and later, pastor of

St. James C.M.E. Church in Washington, Georgia. In 2006, Mason curated *House of Alpha*, an exhibition which displayed the records of Alpha Phi Alpha, Incorporated, local chapters and the personal collection of fraternity members for the fraternity's centenary in Washington, D.C. In 2008, Mason was named Alpha Phi Alpha, Incorporated's thirty-third general president. Mason served as Morehouse College's archivist and interim director of Student Affairs.

Mason has authored several books including, *Going Against the Wind: A History of African Americans in Atlanta*, *Black Atlanta in the Roaring Twenties*, *African-American Life in Jacksonville, Florida*, *The History of Black Entertainment in Atlanta*, and *African-American Life in DeKalb County, 1823-1970 (Images of America: Georgia)*.

Herman 'Skip' Mason was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on 06/20/2011.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Herman "Skip" Mason was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on June 20, 2011, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Archivist Herman "Skip" Mason (1962 -) served as the 33rd general president of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the college archivist at Morris Brown College and Morehouse 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:

Mason, Herman

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Mason, Herman--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Archivist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Herman "Skip" Mason, June 20, 2011. 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 Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_001, TRT: 1:31:22 ?

Herman "Skip" Mason was born on July 14, 1962 in Atlanta, Georgia to Delores Harris Hughes and Herman Mason, Sr. He traced his maternal lineage to Emmie London and Henry London, who were enslaved on a plantation in Georgia. Their daughter, Ellen London Barton, married Floyd Barton, and gave birth to Lula Barton Casterlow, who was Mason's great-great-grandmother. His great-great-grandfather, Henry Casterlow, changed his name to Henry Smith after fleeing from Georgia. Mason's maternal family then settled in Jacksonville, Florida, where his mother was later raised. Mason's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Mason, moved to Jacksonville from McCormick, South Carolina. She met and married James Mason, who migrated from Hazlehurst, Georgia, and together they raised Mason's father. A talented athlete, Mason's father served in the Korean War, and later met Mason's mother at a dance in Jacksonville. Upon learning that she attended Morris Brown College, he applied and was admitted with a basketball scholarship.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_002, TRT: 2:33:54 ?

Herman "Skip" Mason's maternal grandmother, Lola Pollock Harris, worked as a domestic for a wealthy Jewish family in Jacksonville, Florida. They gave Mason's mother, Deloris Harris Hughes, a wardrobe of high end clothes when she left home to attend Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. There, Mason's mother dated and married his father, Herman Mason, Sr. Mason's parents divorced when he was four years old, and his father moved to Detroit, Michigan. His mother later remarried, and gave birth to Mason's two half-sisters. Mason was welcomed into his stepfather's family, and became close with his step-grandparents, who lived nearby. He enjoyed board games and music, and lacked his father's athletic talent. While in the sixth grade, he traded a toy for a friend's clarinet, which sparked his interest in musicianship. He later learned to play the tenor saxophone, and joined a marching band. Mason's mother and stepfather divorced when he was fourteen years old, but he remained close with his stepfather's family.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_003, TRT: 3:32:59 ?

Herman "Skip" Mason began his education at the Berean Christian Junior Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. He transferred to E.C. Clement Elementary School for the second grade, and attended G.A. Towns Elementary School the following year. Concurrently, his mother desegregated the teaching staff at one of Atlanta's all-white schools. Mason first attended an integrated school during the seventh grade at Ben Hill UMC Christian Academy. His white teacher was kind, and they formed a lifelong friendship. Next, Mason attended Therrell High School, where he ran for the student government. He aspired to attend Morris Brown College, but a guidance counselor convinced him to look elsewhere; and, in 1980, Mason matriculated at Newberry College, a predominantly white school in South Carolina. After one year, he transferred to Morris Brown College, where he joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He also became a tour guide at the Herndon Home Museum, the former residence of Atlanta Life Insurance Company founder Alonzo Herndon.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_004, TRT: 4:30:29 ?

Herman “Skip” Mason attended Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he began researching his family, and worked as a tour guide at the Herndon Home Museum. After graduating in 1984, Mason earned a master’s degree at Atlanta University, and conducted tours for the National Park Service. He also worked for the Atlanta Fulton Public Library System, and graduated from Atlanta University’s library school. From 1992 to 1999, Mason taught history at Morehouse College. During this time, he created the historical markers for Auburn Avenue and the Atlanta University Center. Next, Mason was hired as the dean of students and vice president of student services at Morris Brown College, where he served until the college lost its accreditation in 2003. Later that year, Mason was hired as Morehouse College’s archivist and director of the Learning Resource Center. He secured funding to create a college archive, and began processing the papers of the school’s former presidents, including Benjamin Mays.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_005, TRT: 5:32:19 ?

Herman “Skip” Mason wrote his graduate thesis on rural African American families in the late 1800s. His first published work was ‘Going Against the Wind: A Pictorial History of African Americans in Atlanta.’ Later, Mason was approached by Arcadia Press to write a history of African Americans in Jacksonville, Florida, which became the first volume in the publisher’s black heritage series. Mason’s first curated exhibit was about Atlanta’s African American photographers; and, for Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity’s centennial celebration, he curated an exhibit on the fraternity’s history. In 2008, Mason launched a campaign for the fraternity’s general presidency, and used Facebook to reach younger members. Following his inauguration in January of 2009, the fraternity sent a relief mission to Haiti, which had recently suffered a series of hurricanes. At the time of the interview, Mason was preparing to join President Barack Obama in dedicating the fraternity’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial on the National Mall.

Video Oral History Interview with Herman "Skip" Mason, Section A2011_037_001_006, TRT: 6:15:49 ?

Herman “Skip” Mason dedicated his career to preserving the history of African Americans in Atlanta, Georgia. As a result, he learned about Atlanta’s strong black business community, and members of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity like civil rights leader Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., publishing executive John H. Johnson and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Through his genealogical research, Mason also learned about his ancestors, including his maternal great-great-great-grandmother, Ellen London Barton. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.