

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Lee

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lee, William, H., 1936 -
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Lee,
Dates:	November 5, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:44:39).
Abstract:	Newspaper publishing chief executive William Lee (1936 - 2019) co-founded the Sacramento Observer where he served as president and publisher for over fifty years. Lee was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 5, 2013, in Sacramento, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_293
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper publisher William H. Lee was born on May 29, 1936 in Austin, Texas. Williams attended Sacramento State College from 1953 to 1955, and went on to earn his A.B. degree in journalism from the University of California in 1957.

From 1959 to 1965, Lee served in the U.S. Air Force. Lee, along with radioman Glinio Gladden and businessman John W. Cole, founded the *Sacramento Observer* on November 22, 1962. Despite early challenges, Lee became president and sole publisher of the paper in 1965. At that time, he also founded Lee Publishing, Col. Five years later, under his leadership, the *Sacramento Observer* was named the number one African American newspaper in the United States. Throughout the years, the *Sacramento Observer* has been a strong community leader and was the catalyst for organizing the local chapter of the National Urban League. In the past The *Sacramento Observer* has sponsored numerous community events including organizing the annual Sacramento Black Expo to celebrate African American history featuring seminars, workshops, concerts and a marketplace.

In 2001, a year after Lee appointed his late wife Kathryn Lee, as co-publisher, the newspaper launched an online news site, SacObserver.com. Its first inception featured select articles from The *Sacramento Observer* newspaper. Lee's youngest son, Lawrence Charles Lee, served as the president and CEO of SacObserver.com. Then, in 2005, executive and publishing control of the *Sacramento Observer* passed from Lee and his wife to his son Lawrence Charles Lee, who now is the sole publisher, president, general manager of the *Sacramento Observer* and Lee Publishing, Co.

From 1970 to 1973, Lee served as secretary and as a member of the board of directors of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. He was elected as president of the West Coast Black Publishers Association 1974. He is founder and past president of the Men's Civic League of Sacramento, co-founder of the Sacramento Area Black Caucus, and is a lifetime member of the N.A.A.C.P.

Lee received Sacramento's Outstanding Young Man of the Year Award (1965), the Carly Murphy Plaque for

community service (1994), the. The *Sacramento Observer* was a recipient of the Media Award from the Western Regional Conference of Elected Black Officials in (1973) and the John B. Russwurm Trophy – which is considered to be the Pulitzer Prize in African American newspaper publishing – from the National Newspaper Publishers Association (1973, 1975).

Lee and his late wife Kathryn Lee, have three sons: Lawrence Charles, William Hanford, Jr., and Roderick Joseph (deceased).

William H. Lee was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 5, 2013.

Lee passed away on September 22, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William Lee was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 5, 2013, in Sacramento, California, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Newspaper publishing chief executive William Lee (1936 - 2019) co-founded the Sacramento Observer where he served as president and publisher for over fifty years.

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:

Lee, William, H., 1936 -

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Lee, William, H., 1936 ---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 William Lee, November 5, 2013. 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 William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_001, TRT: 1:29:51 ?

William Lee was born on May 29, 1936 in Austin, Texas to Carrie Woods Lee and Charles R. Lee. His father was born in 1904 in Bastrop, Texas, where Lee's grandfather worked as a mechanic. Lee's father later moved to Austin, where he attended Huston-Tillotson College. Lee's mother was born in Austin in 1914, and her father farmed in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She became a domestic worker upon graduating from Austin's L.C. Anderson High School. When Lee was a boy, he moved with his parents and brothers to the Hunters Point section of San Francisco, California. His father was a mechanic, and worked at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation until acquiring a year-long contract in Okinawa, Japan. Upon returning to San Francisco, he opened a barbecue restaurant in the city's Fillmore District. Lee attended San Francisco's Raphael Weill Elementary School and Roosevelt Junior High School. In 1949, he and his family moved to Sacramento, California, where his father became a minister and waste removal transportation manager.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_002, TRT: 2:29:07 ?

William Lee moved with his older brother, James Lee, and parents, Carrie Woods Lee and Charles R. Lee, to the Del Paso Heights area of Sacramento, California in 1949. There, Lee attended Grant Union High School, where he excelled in mathematics and basketball. Upon graduating in 1953, he enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley. Lee was one of three hundred black students on the large campus, and lacked resources like black organizations and African American faculty. After a few weeks, he decided to return home to Sacramento. He studied for two years at Sacramento State College before returning to University of California, Berkeley, where his classmates included the football quarterback Joe Kapp. Lee completed a bachelor's degree in accounting in 1957. At this point in the interview, Lee talks about University of California, Berkeley's student-organized Free Speech Movement, which began in the mid-1960s, after his graduation. Lee also describes the children's book that was based upon his family.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_003, TRT: 3:28:43 ?

William Lee attended the University of California, Berkeley from 1955 to 1957. During this period, he and the school's other African American students received little support from the faculty, who were ignorant about the black experience. Upon graduating with an accounting degree in 1957, Lee was hired as a statistician at Aerojet Rocketdyne in Sacramento, California. He also applied successfully for a real estate license, and founded the Lee Realty Company. Around this time, Lee met his wife, Kathryn Charles Lee, who worked for Sacramento County. In 1959, Lee became the founding president of the Men's Civic League of Sacramento. The organization assumed ownership of the Sacramento Outlook, a religious publication, which Lee rebranded as a black newspaper called The Sacramento Observer. Lee also talks about the City of Sacramento's racially restrictive housing covenants, and local attorney Nathaniel S. Colley's role in the passage of the California Fair Housing Act of 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_004, TRT: 4:28:14 ?

William Lee founded The Sacramento Observer newspaper in partnership with Eugene Gladden and John W. Cole in 1962. After a significant profit loss in 1964, Lee's business partners surrendered the paper's ownership to Lee and his

wife, Kathryn Charles Lee. To increase readership, Lee developed special editions that focused on topics like careers and education. He was inspired by the recognition of other black newspaper publishers at the National Newspaper Publishers Association convention in 1968; and, five years later, The Sacramento Observer was honored with the John B. Russwurm Trophy, which was awarded to the nation's top black publication. At this point in the interview, Lee describes the newspaper's operations, which were overseen by his son, Larry Lee. He also talks about state politician William Byron Rumford; the City of Sacramento's black leaders, like Marion J. Woods and Sacramento State College President James G. Bond; and the growth of the Sacramento's black community.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_005, TRT: 5:29:19 ?

William Lee was the publisher of The Sacramento Observer, a black newspaper based in Sacramento, California. Since its founding in 1962, Lee worked to expand the newspaper's editorial goals, advertising and outreach. At the time of the interview, non-black individuals comprised nearly a third of the newspaper's readership. The Sacramento Outlook's remained committed to covering stories relevant to Sacramento's African American community, such as a recent visit from Martin Luther King III; and also reported on the activities of the City of Sacramento government. Lee talks about black political representation in the City of Sacramento, whose mayor, Kevin Johnson, credited his early exposure to The Sacramento Observer. Lee also describes paper's staff, which included his son, Larry Lee; principal writers Genoa Barrow, Antonio Ray Harvey and Mardeio Cannon; and the photojournalist Larry Dalton, who mounted the exhibition 'The Man Behind the Lens' to showcase photographs from the newspaper's history.

Video Oral History Interview with William Lee, Section A2013_293_001_006, TRT: 6:19:25 ?

William Lee served as the publisher of The Sacramento Observer in Sacramento, California for over fifty years. During this period, the newspaper founded a nonprofit organization called the Observer Media Institute to train young journalists in Sacramento. In addition, Lee was chosen as the namesake of William Lee College Prep, a charter school in Sacramento. With his wife, Kathryn Charles Lee, Lee had two sons: Larry Lee, who joined the staff of The Sacramento Observer; and William Lee, Jr., who worked in the entertainment industry in Atlanta, Georgia. Lee reflects upon his career at The Sacramento Observer, as well as his legacy and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Lee concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.