

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Frank Lumpkin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lumpkin, Frank, 1916-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Frank Lumpkin,
Dates:	June 6, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:26:28).
Abstract:	Labor leader and steelworker Frank Lumpkin (1916 - 2010) is the organizer of the Save Our Jobs Committee. Under his leadership, the group protested for workers' rights in Illinois and Washington, D.C, and succeeded in winning multiple court settlements that totaled \$19 million. Lumpkin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_082
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born the third of 10 children on October 13, 1916, Frank Lumpkin is known for winning a 17-year fight against a steel mill, but he also participated in numerous other struggles for social justice. His family, sharecroppers in Washington, Georgia, moved to Florida to pick oranges when Lumpkin was six years old. At age 13, he lost two fingers when others dared him to touch a power line. Two years later, Lumpkin left school to pick fruit full-time.

As a young man, Lumpkin boxed well enough to fight professionally. He also worked in the orange groves and as a chauffeur. Following a brother who found better pay as a steelworker, Lumpkin moved to Buffalo, New York and got a job at Bethlehem Steel in 1941. Joining the merchant marines in 1943, he took part in a strike organized by the integrated National Maritime Union and his belief in communism took hold.

In 1949, Frank Lumpkin moved to Chicago and married Beatrice. The Wisconsin Steel Mill hired Lumpkin in 1950, and he quickly led an unsuccessful movement to bring a national union to his workplace. Lumpkin continued at the plant until 1980, when it closed down in a corrupt scheme to cheat its workers out of their last paychecks, pensions and benefits. The in-house union refused to fight, and Lumpkin organized the Save Our Jobs Committee. Under his leadership, the group picketed offices in Illinois and Washington, D.C. Fighting hard and long, Save Our Jobs finally succeeded in winning multiple court settlements that totaled \$19 million. Although this represented a small monetary victory for the 2,500 workers the committee represented, Lumpkin succeeded in showing that united, people are strong.

Lumpkin has fought throughout his life for such causes as racial justice, living wages and peace. Mayor Harold Washington appointed him to task forces on hunger and dislocated workers. Frank and Beatrice Lumpkin have traveled internationally, visiting Eastern Europe and Russia behind the Iron Curtain as well as Africa and Latin America. Lumpkin remained a member of the Communist Party and the Save Our Jobs Committee, until his death

on March 1, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Frank Lumpkin was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 6, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Labor leader and steelworker Frank Lumpkin (1916 - 2010) is the organizer of the Save Our Jobs Committee. Under his leadership, the group protested for workers' rights in Illinois and Washington, D.C, and succeeded in winning multiple court settlements that totaled \$19 million.

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:

Lumpkin, Frank, 1916-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lumpkin, Frank, 1916---Interviews

African American Steelworker-Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Labor Leader

Steelworker

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 Frank Lumpkin, June 6, 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 Frank Lumpkin, Section A2002_082_001_001, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Frank Lumpkin was born on October 23, 1916 in Washington, Georgia to Hattie Lumpkin and Elmer Lumpkin. His paternal grandfather, Frank Lumpkin, was a farmer; his maternal grandfather, Weber Martin, was a chauffeur and groundskeeper. Lumpkin was one of ten children. Lumpkin's father was a sharecropper who cultivated and harvested fruit from the orange groves in Orlando, Florida. His mother was a washerwoman. Lumpkin remembers helping to work the orange groves with his siblings as a child. He describes walking long distances to attend colored schools. Lumpkin received his elementary school education in a Baptist church before attending Jones High School in Orlando. As a country boy wearing homemade clothing, he remembers fighting with town boys in high school. Lumpkin enjoyed a close relationship with his parents who valued education. He dropped out of school after ninth grade to earn money chopping cotton and working yards. He also began boxing for colleges as an additional source of income.

African American families.

African American fathers.

Sharecropping.

Church schools.

Segregation in education--Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Lumpkin, Section A2002_082_001_002, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

Frank Lumpkin began boxing in Florida after he dropped out of high school in ninth grade. His manager, Luther Yates (ph.), was a white barber who allowed Lumpkin to practice boxing in his garage. During Florida's off-season, Lumpkin would travel to Atlanta, Georgia to box in different venues. Lumpkin boxed for about six years to earn money although he never enjoyed the sport. He reminisces about food he ate as a child and learning to eat with a fork and knife. Lumpkin also remembers losing a few fingers after touching a live wire as a teenager. Before World War II, Lumpkin joined the U.S. Merchant Marine in Buffalo, New York. In 1949, Lumpkin moved to Chicago, Illinois and began working for Wisconsin Steel mill as a chipper. While at the mill, which was not part of the nation steelworkers union, Lumpkin organized workers to discuss working conditions and wages. His memory of his work as a labor organizer is limited.

African American boxers.

Boxing.

Steel-works--United States.

Labor rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Lumpkin, Section A2002_082_001_003, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Frank Lumpkin reflects upon changes he witnessed while working at Wisconsin Steel mill for thirty years. When the mill closed in 1980, Lumpkin hired a lawyer and organized the Save Our Jobs Committee to fight for workers' paychecks, pensions, and benefits. His efforts were supported by labor leader Edward Sadlowski, Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, and Father John Egan who provided a meeting space for the committee. Lumpkin also describes racial tensions in Chicago's Trumbull Park by recounting the Trumbull Park Homes Race Riots in 1953, which are also chronicled in the book "Always Bring a Crowd!: The Story of Frank Lumpkin, Steelworker," by his wife, Beatrice Lumpkin. Lumpkin's organization of workers, fighting and public pressure led to court settlements totaling \$19 million for the members of the Save Our Jobs committee. Although his memory of the events is limited, Lumpkin is able to recount parts of his role and emphasize the impact of labor organization in

effecting change.