

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ray F. Wilson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilson, Ray F.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson,
Dates:	August 11, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:32:45).
Abstract:	Construction entrepreneur and chemistry professor Ray F. Wilson (1926 - 2015) taught chemistry at Texas Southern University for forty-two years, and was the first African American student to receive a Ph.D. in chemistry and math from the University of Texas at Austin. He owned and operated his own building contractor company, and did pro bono work for his church and community after earning his J.D. degree. Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2007, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_232
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chemistry professor, construction entrepreneur, and lawyer Ray Floyd Wilson was born on February 20, 1926, in Giddings, Texas to Beulah and Fred Wilson. As a young boy, Wilson worked with his family in the fields and with the livestock while going to school. Wilson was drafted by the U.S. Navy in 1944, before he could attend college. He went to submarine school and served in World War II in the Pacific Theater. While in the Navy, Wilson achieved the rank of petty officer third class. After graduating with his B.S. degree in chemistry and math from Samuel Huston College in 1950, Wilson was awarded his M.S. degree in chemistry and math in 1951 from Texas Southern University (TSU). Subsequent to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1950 decision in *Sweatt v. Painter*, Wilson was the first African American student to receive a Ph.D. in chemistry and math from the University of Texas at Austin in 1953.

After he received his Ph.D., Wilson joined the TSU Faculty in Houston as an associate professor of chemistry. Rising to the rank of full professor in only four years, Wilson continued to teach at TSU for forty-two years, turning down various offers from other universities and research centers. Wilson authored eighty-three different articles that have appeared in national or international scientific journals. He has been a longtime member and president of the TSU chapter of the Texas Association of College Teachers, and mentored many students.

While working as a professor, Wilson started working as a part-time real estate broker in the 1960s. By the 1970s, he owned and operated his own contracting company and was awarded many major public works contracts in Houston over a period of three decades. In 1972, Wilson received his J.D. degree from TSU, graduating with the highest GPA in the school's history. Wilson used his degree to do pro bono work for his church, his community and his own interests. After moving to Houston, Wilson was an active member of the Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ where he oversaw the Sunday school and church credit union.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Wilson served as a Congressional Counselor to the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, the first African American female from a southern state to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives, and Congressman Mickey Leland. Wilson retired from TSU in 1999.

Ray Floyd Wilson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 11, 2007.

Wilson passed away on June 10, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ray F. Wilson was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 11, 2007, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Construction entrepreneur and chemistry professor Ray F. Wilson (1926 - 2015) taught chemistry at Texas Southern University for forty-two years, and was the first African American student to receive a Ph.D. in chemistry and math from the University of Texas at Austin. He owned and operated his own building contractor company, and did pro bono work for his church and community after earning his J.D. degree.

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:

Wilson, Ray F.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Wilson, Ray F.--Interviews

Chemistry—Research

Chemists, African American--interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Chemist

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Ray F. Wilson, August 11, 2007. 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 Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Ray F. Wilson was born on February 20, 1926 in Giddings, Texas to Beulah McCloud Wilson and Fred Wilson. His maternal grandparents, Mary McCloud and John McCloud, were born in Cedar Creek, Texas, where they raised cattle on a large farm. Wilson's mother was born in Cedar Creek during the 1890s. She was educated through the sixth grade; and, after the death of her father, left school to assist her mother on the farm. Wilson's mother was an active member of the Bluff Creek Baptist Church in Giddings, Texas, as well as a talented seamstress and cook. Wilson's paternal great-aunt, Maddie Wade, who was very fair, lived as a slave until the age of thirty-seven years old. After emancipation, she became a landowner, despite having never learned to read. Wilson's father was born in the late 1890s, and inherited Wade's farmland in Lee County, Texas. Wilson grew up there, where his chores included milking the cows and churning butter.

Ranch life--Texas.

African American families--Texas.

African Americans--Childhood and youth--Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Ray F. Wilson grew up in the Bluff Creek area of Giddings, Texas, and attended the Bluff Creek Baptist Church with his family. His father, Fred Wilson, owned several farms in nearby Lee County, Texas. Under Texas' Jim Crow laws, Wilson's father was forced to pay poll taxes in order to vote; and David Everett, a family friend, fled Giddings after an altercation with a white man, later returning as the school superintendent and editor of a newspaper. Despite his experiences of racial discrimination, Wilson's father befriended a number of Giddings' white residents, including businessmen Herbert Wachsmann. As a child, Wilson picked cotton with his brothers, Freddy Wilson, Ural Wilson, and Marvin Wilson, in order to earn money for school supplies. Wilson began his education at the Bluff Creek Public School, and went on to graduate from Giddings Colored High School. Later, he earned a doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin, where he was barred from teaching white students.

Race discrimination--Texas.

Racism--Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Ray F. Wilson was drafted into the U.S. Navy after graduating from Giddings Colored High School in Giddings, Texas in 1944. He completed basic training in Bainbridge, Maryland; and, despite his high test scores, was not allowed to attend Officer Candidate School because of his race. Instead, Wilson served as an officer's steward aboard a submarine in the Pacific Theater. After his discharge in 1946, he enrolled at Samuel Huston College in Austin, Texas, graduating with a B.S. degree in chemistry in 1950. One year later, he received a master's degree from Houston's Texas Southern University, and began his doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Austin. There, his classmates included Heman Marion Sweatt, who integrated the University of Texas in 1950.

Wilson studied under chemistry professors G.H. Ayres and Stanley H. Simonsen, and completed his Ph.D. degree in 1953. That year, he joined the chemistry faculty at Texas Southern University. Wilson also sold real estate, and owned a contracting firm.

United States. Navy. African Americans.

African Americans, Education (higher).

World War, 1939-1945.

Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_004, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Ray F. Wilson became a chemistry professor in 1953 at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, where he was supervised by Professor L. Lloyd Woods. Wilson specialized in platinum chemical research, which focused on elements like palladium. Building on the work of analytical chemist Izaak Maurits Kolthoff, Wilson conducted experiments with silver and 1,2,3-Benzotriazole that led to numerous publications. Additionally, Wilson earned a real estate license in 1954, and brokered the sale of repossessed homes through the Federal Housing Administration. He also worked on a variety of government projects with his contracting firm, Five Eleven Home Repair, Inc. Wilson received a J.D. degree from Houston's Thurgood Marshall School of Law in 1972, earning the highest grade point average in the school's history. Wilson married his research partner, Faye Gray Wilson, in 1986. He also recalls his students at Texas Southern University, including chemist Bobby L. Wilson and oil company executive Phillip Merchant.

Texas Southern University--Students.

United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Discrimination in housing--Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_005, TRT: 0:23:20 ?

Ray F. Wilson served as a committeeman under Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, who represented the 18th Congressional District of the State of Texas during the 1970s. After Jordan's retirement in 1979, Wilson supported her successor, Congressman Mickey Leland, although he did not play an official role on Leland's staff. In addition, Wilson served on the National Science Foundation's grant review committee, a role for which he often traveled to Washington, D.C. Wilson was a longtime member of the Pilgrim Congregational United Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, where he was a trustee and the superintendent of the religious education program. Following Wilson's marriage to Faye Gray Wilson in 1986, they built a home together in Houston, south of the Texas Southern University campus. Wilson reflects upon his life, legacy and career. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and his advice to future generations.

Women legislators.

African Americans--Religion.

African American scientists.

Video Oral History Interview with Ray F. Wilson, Section A2007_232_001_006, TRT: 0:10:35 ?

Ray F. Wilson describes how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.