

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Wilford Taylor

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Taylor, Wilford, 1950-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor,
Dates:	July 20, 2004 and October 14, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:19:26).
Abstract:	Circuit court judge The Honorable Wilford Taylor (1950 -) was Hampton, Virginia's first full time African American judge. He served as a judge in the General District Court until 1995, after which he was appointed to the Circuit Court. Taylor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 20, 2004 and October 14, 2004, in Hampton, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_101
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Wilford Taylor, Jr. was born on January 15, 1950 in Newport News, Virginia. His mother was a homemaker and later a teacher and his father was a mail carrier and chef. He grew up in Hampton, Virginia's Aberdeen community, which is now a historic landmark in the city. In 1968, Taylor was part of the first group of African Americans to integrate Hampton High School. While at Hampton High, he was a member of the football, baseball, track and tennis teams and the thespian club. He earned his high school diploma in 1968.

Taylor then attended Hampton Institute, where he earned his B.S. degree in business management in 1972. Following his graduation, he served in the United States army for the next three years, while earning his master's of commerce degree from the University of Richmond in 1975. In 1978, Taylor earned his law degree from the College of William and Mary. He started a law firm with good friend and attorney Bobby Scott, who is now a Congressman. In 1981, the firm merged with another firm and became Scott, Coles, Brown, Taylor and Melvin. From 1983 until 1985, Taylor worked as the Deputy City Attorney for Hampton. In 1985, Taylor made history, becoming Hampton's first full time African American judge. He served as a judge in the General District Court until 1995, when he was appointed to the Circuit Court, a position he holds today.

Taylor is an adjunct professor at his alma mater, teaching trial advocacy and therapeutic jurisprudence. He is a member of numerous organizations including the American Judges Association, Virginia State Bar Association and Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee.

He and his wife, Linda, reside in Hampton and have two grown children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on July 20, 2004 and October 14, 2004, in Hampton, Virginia, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Circuit court judge The Honorable Wilford Taylor (1950 -) was Hampton, Virginia's first full time African American judge. He served as a judge in the General District Court until 1995, after which he was appointed to the Circuit Court.

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:

Taylor, Wilford, 1950-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Taylor, Wilford, 1950---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Circuit Court Judge

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 The Honorable Wilford Taylor, July 20, 2004 and October 14, 2004. 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 The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section A2004_101_002_001, TRT: 0:30:39 ?

The Honorable Wilford Taylor was born on January 15, 1950 in Newport News, Virginia. His mother, Zenobia Miller, was born in Fort Valley, Georgia. His maternal family donated some of their land to Fort Valley State College and his grandfather was one of the top farmers in Georgia. His grandmother and mother were firm believers in education. Taylor's father, Wilford Taylor, Sr., was born in Marion, South Carolina. His paternal grandfather was a barber and a well-versed minister. When the family migrated north to Hampton, his father attended Hampton Institute where he met Taylor's mother before enlisting in the U.S.

Navy during World War II. Following his stint with the Navy he returned to Hampton where he became a letter carrier. Taylor grew up with his three siblings in Aberdeen Gardens where he recalls the smells of changing seasons and crab meat. He attended Aberdeen Elementary School where he was encouraged by his teachers. Taylor enjoyed summer visits to Fort Valley, reading and playing sports.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section A2004_101_002_002, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

The Honorable Wilford Taylor's parents were Catholic and emphasized the importance of education. An extrovert, Taylor attended junior high school in Hampton where he played football and the saxophone and aspired to be an airline pilot. In 1965 Taylor's parents sent him to Hampton High, a majority white school, so he could access resources majority black schools lacked. While there, Taylor regularly encountered racism in contrast to his experience at the mostly black Aberdeen Elementary School. However, he enjoyed reading, shop classes and made long-lasting friendships with both black and white students. Taylor participated in the thespian club and visited Broadway in New York City. He remembers his school's response to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Taylor then attended Hampton Institute where he majored in business, interned with Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick, New Jersey for a year, joined the Groove Phi Groove Social Fellowship and directed the school's drug education program.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section A2004_101_002_003, TRT: 0:31:22 ?

The Honorable Wilford Taylor graduated from Hampton Institute in 1972 and joined the U.S. Army; he was stationed in Fort Lee, Virginia as a financial management instructor. While there he received his master's of commerce from the University of Richmond. Taylor married his wife, Linda Taylor, in 1976 following his three-year tenure with the ROTC. He then attended William & Mary Law School, an experience he found academically rigorous yet rewarding, especially when studying civil rights cases in his constitutional law class. He and his friend Bobby Scott began a federal litigation law firm which became Scott, Coles, Brown, Taylor and Melvin P.C. in 1981. In 1983 he became the first African American Deputy City Attorney for Hampton where he advised city department heads on legal issues. Two years later Taylor successfully lobbied the Virginia General Assembly and Hampton Bar Association and became the first full-time African American judge in the area when appointed to the Hampton General District Court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section A2004_101_002_004, TRT: 0:27:47 ?

The Honorable Wilford Taylor tried a variety of misdemeanor cases, such as traffic and city ordinance violations, as general district court judge in Hampton, Virginia. Although extremely nervous his first day on the job, he evolved into judge known for being tough yet fair. In 1995 Taylor was appointed to the Hampton Circuit Court, where he tried felony cases. He also is an adjunct professor at his alma mater, William & Mary School of Law, where he teaches trial advocacy. Taylor explains how he handles cases where he knows the parties involved and why family cases are especially critical and challenging, both legally and for the community. Taylor considers the role of the media in representing court proceedings to the public and offers his perspective on the types of cases he sees, juries and mandatory sentencing. He reflects upon his life experiences and considers his position as a role model. He shares advice for

entering the law profession and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section A2004_101_002_005,
TRT: 0:16:40 ?

The Honorable Wilford Taylor narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_001E,
TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_002,
TRT: 0:30:48 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_002E,
TRT: 0:30:48 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_003E,
TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_004,
TRT: 0:30:59 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilford Taylor, Section B2004_101_001_004E,
TRT: 0:30:59 ?