

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend John H. Cross, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cross, John H., 1925-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend John H. Cross, Jr.,
Dates:	April 13, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:29:59).
Abstract:	Pastor Reverend John H. Cross, Jr. (1925 - 2007) was the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, site of the September 15, 1963 bombing that killed four young girls and marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Later, he was director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, and Black Church Relations Director of Atlanta Baptist Association of the Atlanta Baptist Association. Cross was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_075
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr., was born to Margie Ann and John H. Cross, Sr., on January 27, 1925, in Haynes, Arkansas. He attended elementary school at Spring Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Haynes, Arkansas, and Lincoln High School in Forrest City, Arkansas. As a teenager, Cross gave his trial sermon and was ordained at Springfield Missionary Baptist Church.

After high school, in 1944, Cross entered the United States Army as an assistant regimental chaplain. Completing his tour of duty, he worked as a teacher for the Haynes public schools. Cross attended Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia, where he met and married his wife, Julia. Cross earned his B.A. degree in social science in 1950. He then worked as a counselor for boys and as a minister at Oak Grove Baptist Church in Widewater, Virginia. Cross returned to Virginia Union University's School of Theology and received his M.Div. degree in 1959.

Cross was working as pastor of Gravel Hill Baptist Church in 1962 when he was called to pastor the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The church became a haven for civil rights organizers and a target for Southern segregationists. On September 15, 1963, the church was bombed. The explosion killed four young girls, injured many others. and marked a turning point in the civil rights movement. Cross stayed on as pastor until 1968. He was appointed director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, where he taught history and sociology. Cross then moved to Decatur, Georgia, where he became the associate pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church for seven years. Cross served as the black church relations director of the Atlanta Baptist Association from 1977 until he retired in 1989. After retirement, Cross stay involved in several part-time ministries, such as chaplain at the DeKalb and Fulton County youth development centers and as interim pastor at

Divine Unity and Liberty Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Cross has received numerous awards and proclamations for his role in the civil rights movement and his dynamic leadership at the historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, as well as his work to improve race relations, missions and ecumenism in the United States and Africa. Cross has four children: Michael, Alma, Lynn, and Barbara, who was his caregiver.

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr. passed away on November 15, 2007, at the age of 82.

Reverend John Haywood Cross, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 13, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend John H. Cross, Jr. was conducted by Denise Gines on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pastor Reverend John H. Cross, Jr. (1925 - 2007) was the pastor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, site of the September 15, 1963 bombing that killed four young girls and marked a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. Later, he was director of the Baptist Student Center at Alabama State University, and Black Church Relations Director of Atlanta Baptist Association of the Atlanta Baptist Association.

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:

Cross, John H., 1925-2007

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Cross, John H., 1925-2007--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Alabama--Birmingham--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

African American Baptists--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Baptists.

Occupations:

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Reverend John H. Cross, Jr., April 13, 2006. 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 Reverend John H. Cross, Jr., Section A2006_075_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Reverend John H. Cross, Jr. was born on January 27, 1925 in Haynes, Arkansas to Margie Cross and John H. Cross, Sr. His parents were active in their local congregation, and raised their children on a farm. Cross attended Lincoln High School in Forrest City, Arkansas, where he played baseball. Cross began preaching early; and, after graduation, became a U.S. Army chaplain. When he returned from U.S. military service, he studied social work at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia; and then theology at its Graduate School of Religion. There, he was influenced by Professor John Malcus Ellison, who encouraged Cross' involvement in the ministry. In 1949, Cross married Julia Ball Cross, with whom he had four children. He pastored Oak Grove Baptist Church, and later Gravel Hill Baptist Church in Richmond. There, he held vacation bible school, revivals and community outreach programs. In 1962, Cross moved his family to Birmingham, Alabama, where he became the pastor of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

African American families--Arkansas--Haynes.

African American children--Arkansas--Haynes.

African American clergy.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Virginia--Richmond.

African American Baptists.

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).

Oak Grove Baptist Church (Virginia Beach, Va.).

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.)--Students.

African American churches--Virginia--Virginia Beach.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend John H. Cross, Jr., Section A2006_075_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Reverend John. H. Cross, Jr. was encouraged to become a pastor from a young age, and was called to the ministry as a teenager. He pastored the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, where he became active in the Civil Rights Movement, and organized his congregation's involvement in the community. With Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, Cross participated in the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, which was headquartered at the 16th Street Baptist Church. After Cross received death threats, he increased

security at the church. However, on September 15, 1963, Cross was teaching a Sunday school lesson about forgiveness, when a bomb was discharged in the church. He helped search for survivors in the rubble, and discovered the bodies of the four young female victims together. He consoled his congregation outside, and later, alongside Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., helped plan their funerals. In the following years, Cross testified at a series of trials on behalf of the victims.

African American clergy.

Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama.

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.

African American churches--Alabama--Birmingham.

Violence--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).

Shuttlesworth, Fred L., 1922-2011.

16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Ala., 1963.

African American Baptists--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend John H. Cross, Jr., Section A2006_075_001_003,
TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Reverend John H. Cross, Jr. describes the rebuilding of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and how he would like to be remembered. Then, his daughter, Barbara Cross, describes the bombing of the church in 1963. After her Sunday school lesson that day, Cross' daughter nearly accompanied her friend to the restroom, but instead remained in the classroom, where she was injured in the explosion. The next day, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy and Dick Gregory arrived at her home. Cross describes the funerals of the victims, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Carol Denise McNair, who were discovered in the church restroom. Black businessman A.G. Gaston and Welsh artist John Petts contributed to the reconstruction of the church. In 2004, the FBI presented Cross' daughter with a pin to commemorate justice for the victims, after the bombing's final living perpetrator was convicted in 2002. She concludes the interview by narrating her father's photographs.

Abernathy, Ralph, 1926-1990.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.

Violence--Alabama--Birmingham--History--20th century.

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).

16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Ala., 1963.

African American Baptists--Alabama.

African American churches--Alabama--Birmingham.

African Americans--Alabama--Social conditions.

Gregory, Dick.