

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Rev. Gary McCants

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*People of Faith – Mosaic of Faith* Oral History project

Interview # PFM-A-L-2020-006

Gary McCants, a Presiding Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church who also worked for thirty-five years in the Illinois state legislature, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *People of Faith – Mosaic of Faith* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Jan 23, 28, Feb 3, 11, 27, Mar 2, 2020

Location: Gary McCants residence in Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcript  
being processed

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 1:56 + 2:01 + 2:08 + 2:17 + 2:58 + 1:52 / 1.93 + 2.02  
+ 2.13 + 2.28 + 2.97 + 1.87 = 13.2 hrs

Session 1: Early life, education and beginning of career with the IL House Democrats

Session 2: Years as an IL House legislative staffer through 1990 and ERA fight

Session 3: Gary's spiritual journey and beliefs of African Methodist Episcopal Church

Session 4: Ministry as an AME preacher/pastor in Kewanee and Presiding Elder in  
AME Church

Session 5: Lobbyist for IL Bankers Assn during housing crisis and memories of Obama

Session 6: Reflections of a lobbyist on legislative leaders and closing comments

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on July 15, 2020.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,  
Illinois.

# Abstract

## Gary McCants, *People of Faith*, PFM-A-L-2020-006

**Biographical Information/Overview of Interview:** Gary McCants was born on July 22, 1948 in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he grew up, graduating from Courter Technical High School in 1967. McCants earned a BS degree from Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio) in 1971, and an MBA degree from Atlanta University in 1973. By 1975 he was newly married to Galda Garnett and began working with the Illinois House Democrats, living in Springfield. He spent the next fifteen years in Springfield working on the House Democratic staff.

Gary's spiritual awakening occurred in 1979 when he had a vivid dream and because of that came to believe that God had a purpose for him. For the next several years Gary struggled with what that might be, reluctant to believe that God's intent might lead him to the ministry and preaching. All the while, he continued to work in the Illinois House of Representatives. By the early months of 1981 McCants accepted that he was called to preach and began a lengthy period of training and reflections, which included taking courses under the auspices of the Illinois Conference, AME Church, Ministerial Training Board; Midwest Bible College in Bloomington, Illinois and National Baptist Training Institute satellite ministry, taught in Springfield, Illinois. This led to Gary accepting a call to minister to a small AME congregation, Bethel AME Church in Kewanee, Illinois in 1985, where he continued to serve until 1994. In that year he became pastor of Allen Chapel AME Church in Alton, IL.

In 1988 Gary resigned from the House Democratic staff, but soon began working as a staff analyst and later as lobbyist for the Illinois Banker's Association. He continued in that role until his retirement in 2012. He discussed his lobbying experiences during the heady real estate boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and also the housing market collapse which began in late 2008. McCants talked extensively about his memories of state Senator Barack Obama, and also about many of the other legislators he came to know during his thirty-five years with the legislature. In 2007 he was appointed as the presiding elder for the South District – Illinois Conference of the AME Church. Gary's wife Galda also became a reverend with the AME Church in 2009.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** African Methodist Episcopal Church; Galda Garnett McCants; Capitol building prayer room; AME church governance; Barack Obama; Michael Madigan; Jim Edgar; Jim Thompson; Emil Jones; George Ryan; Rod Blagojevich; John Cullerton; Tom Cross; Community Reinvestment Act in Illinois; 2008 housing collapse;

**Note to the Reader:** Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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