

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Clark Burrus

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Burrus, Clark, 1928-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus,
Dates:	October 1, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:09:34).
Abstract:	Bank executive and city comptroller The Honorable Clark Burrus (1928 - 2015) was a financial expert and was the first African American comptroller for the City of Chicago. Burrus was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_193
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Clark Burrus was born in Chicago on November 5, 1928. He grew up on Chicago's south side and graduated from Englewood High School in 1946. He began studies at Texas State University before returning to Chicago to complete both a B.S.C.(1954) and a M.P.A.(1972) at Roosevelt University.

From 1954-1979, Burrus worked for the City of Chicago, and served under Mayors Martin Kennelley, Richard J. Daley, Michael Bilandic, and Jane Byrne. In 1973 he was named City Comptroller, the city's Chief Financial Officer. Under his capable supervision over Chicago's Department of Finance, the City achieved its first Double-A-Bond rating for conformance in accounting.

In 1979 Burrus entered the private sector, serving as the Senior Vice President of the First National Bank of Chicago in the Asset and Liability Management Department, a position he would hold for the next twelve years. In 1991 he was made the Vice Chairman of First Chicago Capital Markets, Inc. and co-head of the Public Banking Department.

Though he retired in 1998, Burrus remained active in Chicago's business community for many years, serving in an advisory capacity on numerous boards and committees. He acted as the Chairman for the Chicago Council on Urban Affairs - Advisory Board, and Co-Chairman for the Health Care Sub-Committee of the Cook County Citizens Budget Review Committee. In addition, he sat on the boards of directors of twelve organizations, including the Economic Development Council, The Harold Washington Foundation, and Urban Gateways. He was a member of the Union League Club of Chicago, The Economic Club of Chicago, The Executives' Club of Chicago, and the Mid-Day Club. He also published articles on minority issues in public finance. Burrus and his wife Lucille had one son, James.

Burrus passed away on June 17, 2015 at age 86.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bank executive and city comptroller The Honorable Clark Burrus (1928 - 2015) was a financial expert and was the first African American comptroller for the City of Chicago.

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:

Burrus, Clark, 1928-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burrus, Clark, 1928-2015--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago (Ill.)

First National Bank of Chicago

Occupations:

City Comptroller

Bank Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Clark Burrus, October 1, 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 The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_001, TRT: 0:30:52 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus discusses his family background in Mississippi and his parents' subsequent move to Chicago. He describes his father Lemmie's work at the Railway Mail Service during the Depression and recalls Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s. He goes on to tell several stories from his childhood on the South Side and recalls the borders between black and white communities at the time. Burrus also proudly details his athletic achievements and the notices he received in area and national newspapers. He remembers his elementary school years, and that he was a troublemaker, as opposed to his brother Lamar, who did well in school. He then remembers the close-knit community he grew up in, where teachers and families lived within blocks of each other, and participated in raising the neighborhood children.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:24 ?

First Chicago Bank executive Clark Burrus recalls the tough discipline that he received from his father Lemmie Burrus. He describes his high school years and how, through the devotion of his parents and his involvement in athletics, he was able to avoid getting into trouble as many of his peers did. He remembers his participation in athletics and how it nearly led to a college scholarship. He decides to attend Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas where he finds a level of racism he had not experienced while growing up in Chicago. Burrus then describes revisiting Texas Southern to receive an award. Lastly, Burrus recounts the hard work and sacrifices made by himself and his mother to get through college at Roosevelt University.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus recalls his attempt to find his first job out of college and the disparity between the private and public sectors in the hiring of minorities. He eventually finds a position in the finance department of the City of Chicago. There he is promoted to CFO and Comptroller, a position he held for several years, and which had to be divided into two positions after his departure. As CFO and Comptroller he oversees the transitions of several Chicago mayors. He discusses the administrations of Harold Washington and Eugene Sawyer in detail. He also fondly recalls mentoring Dorothy Brown from her early days as a CPA to her election as Cook County Clerk.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_004,
TRT: 0:29:12 ?

First National Bank of Chicago Vice-Chairman Clark Burrus recalls his involvement in Chicago politics. As CFO and Comptroller of the City of Chicago, Burrus oversees the transitions of several Chicago mayors starting with Richard J. Daley. He gives a detailed account of his work with former Mayors Jane Byrne and Mike Bilandic. He also gives a behind-the-scenes view of the appointment of Mayor Mike Bilandic over Wilson Frost. Burrus then reflects on the amount of power he wielded in Chicago politics and attributes this to his apolitical stance. He also recalls mentoring young people at First National Bank of Chicago and the differences that remain between opportunities for blacks and whites.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus recalls his move from his work in public service at the City of Chicago into the private sector. After a bidding war between area banks, he decides to take a position with First National Bank of Chicago. He finds First National to be in the midst of a transition and describes how he was

able to navigate his volatile first months at the company. Burrus travels between Chicago, New York and London, finally settling in Chicago after Barry Sullivan is named chairman of First National. Burrus then presents a bold strategic plan to Sullivan which eventually changes the face of international banking. He goes on to discuss why he chose to stay out of the spotlight, preferring to do his work behind the scenes. Burrus then details how he forged financial relationships with several East Coast banks and universities.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_006,
TRT: 0:28:13 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus describes the highlight of his career, moving banking into the twentieth century on an international level. In nuts and bolts terms, he describes the differences between investment and commercial banking and how changes in federal law affected both areas. Burrus goes on to discuss the current state of African American banks in Chicago and why they still have a difficult time in succeeding. He talks about the history of black banking in Chicago and how black banks must still operate under a different set of unwritten rules than white banks.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_007,
TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus discusses his appointment to the Chicago School Board and how he helped to bail the school system out of a financial crisis. He then describes his work with both the Chicago Transit Authority as chairman, and the Illinois Regional Transportation Authority, as board member. Burrus tells an anecdote about corruption at the Chicago Housing Authority and how misuse of power and manipulation of public funds led to a scandal in the organization. He goes on to discuss a crisis in the Washington D.C. city budget, and how he was able to both bail out the city and make a profit for First National Bank of Chicago through his dynamic banking approach.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_008,
TRT: 0:23:29 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus discusses his hopes and concerns for the future of the black community. He details the differences between creating jobs for African Americans, and creating capital for black communities. Burrus describes the unfortunate situation on Chicago's South Side where ethnic groups such as Asians and Arabs have moved in to take over small businesses. He talks about the disadvantages that blacks face in buying and running small businesses in their own neighborhoods. He then goes on to talk about his legacy, which he hopes is reflected in the mentoring of African Americans throughout his business career. He then reflects sadly on the fact that neither of his parents lived to see his success.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Clark Burrus, Section A2002_193_001_009,
TRT: 0:19:57 ?

Banking executive Clark Burrus describes several photographs from his life and career.