

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert T. Starks

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Starks, Robert T., 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks,
Dates:	December 15, 2009
Bulk Dates:	2009
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:45:54).
Abstract:	Social activist and professor Robert T. Starks (1944 -) served as an associate professor of political science at Northeastern Illinois University's Center for Inner City Studies, as an issues advisor to Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and political advisor to the late Chicago mayor Harold Washington. He was the founder and chair of the Task Force for Black Political Empowerment, and has been the local chair of the Free South Africa Movement. Starks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2009_147
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator, political consultant and activist professor, Robert Terry Starks was born on January 24, 1944 in Grenada, Mississippi. He earned his B.S. degree from Chicago's Loyola University in 1968. He earned his M.A. degree in political science also from Loyola in 1971. In 1968, Starks served as a management consultant for Booze Allen Hamilton and a research specialist for the Chicago Urban League. From 1970 to 1972, Starks served as Director of Black Studies at Northern Illinois University and associate professor of political science. He joined the faculty of Northeastern Illinois University's Center for Inner City Studies (NEIU CICS) in 1976 where he is associate professor of political science.

Starks served as an issues advisor to Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and political advisor to the late Chicago mayor, Harold Washington. He was the founding chair of the Task Force for Black Political Empowerment and has been the local chair of the Free South Africa Movement. In 2001, Starks founded the Harold Washington Institute for Research and Policy Studies at NEIU CICS. Since 1991, Starks has contributed a weekly column to *N'Digo* news magazine and hosted a show on WVON Radio in the early 1990s. He also was a contributing editor to *Urban Affairs Quarterly*.

Starks has appeared on WVON Radio's *On Target* and on ABC-TV's *Nightline*, the *Today Show*, C-SPAN, CNN News and CNN's *Crossfire* television programs. His article "Harold Washington and the Politics of Reform" appeared in *Racial Politics in American Cities* by Rufus Browning. Starks is chairperson of the board of the Illinois Black United Fund and a member of innumerable civic committees. The recipient of a treasure of community award, he lives in the Woodlawn community with his wife, Judith and his children, Kenya and Robert. Starks has also authored a book on the political life of Harold Washington.

Starks was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 15, 2009.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert T. Starks was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 15, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Social activist and professor Robert T. Starks (1944 -) served as an associate professor of political science at Northeastern Illinois University's Center for Inner City Studies, as an issues advisor to Rev. Jesse L. Jackson and political advisor to the late Chicago mayor Harold Washington. He was the founder and chair of the Task Force for Black Political Empowerment, and has been the local chair of the Free South Africa Movement.

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:

Starks, Robert T., 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Starks, Robert T., 1944- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Social Activist

Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|EducationMakers

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 Robert T. Starks, December 15, 2009. 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 Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_001, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Robert T. Starks describes his family background. His mother, Lula Ella Starks, was born in 1916 in Graysport, Mississippi to a family of sharecroppers. Her grandfather, Clarence Bradley, was born a slave in Virginia in 1859 but eventually acquired three hundred acres of land in Mississippi. However, Bradley's descendants lost the land to nearby white farmers, from whom the U.S. government purchased the land to build a dam. Starks mother worked as a cook at the U.S. Army's Camp McCain in Mississippi. There, she met Starks' father, soldier Vernon Lamar Terry, who was born April 15, 1915 in Grenada, Mississippi to a local farmer and his wife, teacher Harriet Fleming Terry. Starks was born in 1944 in Grenada. He moved with his mother to Saginaw, Michigan, where she married Monk Shaw. The family then moved to Chicago, Illinois, settling first on the city's West Side before moving to the South Side. Starks explains the rivalry between these two areas of the city. He also talks about his schooling in Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_002, TRT: 0:21:04 ?

Robert T. Starks recalls growing up in Chicago, Illinois and Grenada County, Mississippi. He remembers taking the train between Chicago and Mississippi, and the sights and smells of fresh food at his grandmothers' houses in Grenada County. Starks also recalls the 1955 murder of Emmett Till in nearby Money, Mississippi, and how his family feared for his safety. In Grenada County, he attended Willa Wilson Elementary School and Carey Dodson High School, where he enjoyed following current events and studying history. He remembers the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama, and the Hungarian Uprising against the U.S.S.R., which was crushed by the Soviet army in 1956. During that period, Starks remembers African Americans contrasting the U.S. government's enthusiastic support for the latter with its ambivalence toward the former. Starks talks about Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s popularity with African Americans in the South. He also details his attempts to learn about Communism and socialism.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_003, TRT: 0:32:47 ?

Robert T. Starks talks about his experience at Carey Dodson High School in Grenada County, Mississippi. He was involved in the debate team, drama, and band; he was also class president and a statistician for the football team. Starks spent his summers on the West and South Sides of Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from high school in 1961, he enrolled at Loyola University in Chicago. While he was there, the integrated basketball team won a championship. He studied philosophy, economics, and political science according to the Oxford Method, and also converted to Roman Catholicism. In college, Starks registered as a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and avoided the draft. He also became involved in civil rights activism, working with SNCC and CORE as well as HistoryMakers Fannie Rushing, Timuel Black, Harold Pates Standish E. Willis, Kwame John R. Porter, Dick Gregory, and others.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_004, TRT: 0:21:19 ?

Robert T. Starks talks about his activism during the 1960s. In 1967, while attending Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois, he helped organize a conference at HistoryMaker Kwame John R. Porter's Christ United Methodist Church. Starks describes living in Chicago's South Shore community near HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, hearing Malcolm X speak in Chicago's Trianon Ballroom, and marching with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1966. As a student activist, Starks met leaders of SNCC including H. Rap Brown, Cleveland Sellers, and Stokely Carmichael. After receiving his B.S.

degree in 1967, Starks began graduate work in urban studies at Loyola. Starks recalls debates about the role of segregated housing policies in the race riots of 1967 after the release of the 1968 Kerner Commission Report. Starks received his M.A. degree in 1971. He talks about working at the Urban Education Center; Booz Allen Hamilton, a consulting firm; the Urban League; and Northern Illinois University in DeKalb.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_005, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Robert T. Starks recounts his nonprofit and university teaching career during the late 1960s and 1970s. He explains the ideas of economist Anthony Downs and describes urban decay he saw in East St. Louis, Illinois while working for Booz Allen Hamilton. Starks then joined the National Urban League, before being named director of the new black studies program at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. There, he ran cultural programs with scholars like 'Muhammad Speaks' editor John Woodford, and performers like Osibisa and Elton John. In 1972, he moved to the Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, whose faculty included HistoryMakers Jacob H. Carruthers, Jr. and Conrad Walter Worrill. During this period, Starks was also working toward his Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. Starks recalls the assassination of Black Panther Fred Hampton by Chicago police in 1969 and names the people he worked with at the League and at Chicago's Black Strategy Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_006, TRT: 0:14:56 ?

Robert T. Starks talks about prominent African American cultural and intellectual figures in Chicago, Illinois during the 1970s. He recalls HistoryMakers Maulana Karenga, who created the holiday of Kwanzaa; Phil Cohran, a jazz artist and activist based on Chicago's South Side; and Abena Joan P. Brown, a theater producer who created the ETA Creative Arts Foundation. He also talks about organizing a march for African Liberation Day in 1972, and boycotting the South African Springboks rugby team during its tour in 1981. Starks describes activists Anas Lukeman and Sister Christine Johnson, who knew Malcolm X, W.E.B. DuBois, and Kwame Nkrumah personally; as well as Communist civil rights activist Ishmael Flory, HistoryMaker Margaret Burroughs, and pan-Africanist scholar F.H. Hammurabi.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_007, TRT: 0:23:44 ?

Robert T. Starks recounts his work on African American political campaigns in Chicago, Illinois during the 1970s and 1980s. He attended the 1972 National Black Political Assembly in Gary, Indiana, meeting with HistoryMaker Richard Hatcher. Starks talks about HistoryMakers Vincent Harding, Howard Dodson, and Reverend Jesse L. Jackson. He recalls bringing poet Amiri Baraka to Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, attending conferences on black violence run by HistoryMaker Albert Richard Sampson in 1975, and working with HistoryMaker Jorja Palmer on U.S. Congressional redistricting plans. He talks about how the redistricting efforts pitted Congressman and later Chicago mayor Harold Washington against HistoryMaker Gus Savage. Starks worked with Operation PUSH, and became involved in efforts to select an African American presidential candidate. Though many wanted Harold Washington to run, Jesse Jackson was selected after Washington declined. Starks describes working for Washington's mayoral campaign in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_008, TRT: 0:23:37 ?

Robert T. Starks talks about his career after Harold Washington was elected Mayor of Chicago in 1983. Starks worked with HistoryMaker Lutrelle "Lu" F. Palmer II on Washington's Task Force on Black Political Empowerment, and the

two clashed with the mayor when he selected HistoryMaker Charles Hayes over Palmer as his U.S. Congressional replacement. Starks also recalls the 1984 Democratic National Convention, when he and other delegates for HistoryMaker Jesse L. Jackson booed Coretta Scott King and HistoryMaker Andrew Young for endorsing Walter Mondale. After Washington's 1987 death in office, further conflict broke out over who would succeed him; the City Council elected HistoryMaker Eugene Sawyer. Starks reflects upon the successes and failures of Washington's administration before talking about the Chicago anti-apartheid movement. As a local leader of the Free South Africa Movement, he worked with Jackson to host Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and others. Starks also recalls the Million Man March in 1995.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Starks, Section A2009_147_001_009, TRT: 0:30:57 ?

Robert T. Starks recalls the 1990s and 2000s. In 1995, he wrote a manifesto for the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. Though the leaders of the march, including HistoryMakers Louis Farrakhan, Maulana Karenga, and James Bevel, approved the manifesto, but it was not disseminated, and Starks ended his involvement with the march shortly afterward. Starks talks about how he first met HistoryMaker Barack Obama, and about their early political conflicts before Starks became a supporter of Obama's senatorial and presidential campaigns. Starks analyzes the career of Chicago mayor, Harold Washington, and the lessons it could provide for Obama's presidency. Starks concludes by describing his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy, his family, and how he would like to be remembered.