

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Evers

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Evers, Charles, 1922-2020  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | May 24, 2017   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2017   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:14:10).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Civic activist and political leader Charles Evers (1922 -2020) the brother of slain civil rights leader, Medgar Evers, was the first African American mayor elected in Mississippi post-Reconstruction era. Evers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 24, 2017, in Jackson, Mississippi. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2017_105  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic activist and political leader Charles Evers was born on September 11, 1922 in Decatur, Mississippi to Jess Wright and James Evers. Evers received his B.S. degree from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lorman, Mississippi in 1950.

Evers enlisted in the United States Army and served overseas during World War II. After his return to the U.S., he began working as the first African American disc jockey at WHOC Radio station in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1951. There, he worked for a family-run funeral home, operated a taxi service, a bootleg liquor business and operated the Evers Hotel and Lounge, which featured blues bands. Evers was active in the Mississippi branch of the NAACP and became the chapter's state voter registration chairman in 1954. He also became involved with the Regional Council of Negro Leadership in 1952, and often spoke at its national conferences. In 1956, Evers moved to Chicago, Illinois, where he operated Club Mississippi, the Subway Lounge and the Palm Gardens nightclubs. After the assassination of his brother, Medgar Evers, he returned to Mississippi in 1963 and became the field director for the Mississippi branch of the NAACP. In 1969, Evers was elected as mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, the first African American to be elected to this position in the state of Mississippi during the post-Reconstruction era. Evers ran unsuccessfully for governor of Mississippi in 1971 and for United States Senate in 1978, each time as an independent candidate. He remained as mayor of Fayette until 1989. After losing the mayoral election in 1989, Evers became the store manager of WMPR 90.1FM in Jackson, Mississippi.

Evers has often been honored for his work in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1969, the NAACP named him Man of the Year. He was also selected as a Mississippi delegate for the Democratic National Convention in 1972. Evers, has also published two autobiographies, *Evers*, in 1971, and *Have No Fear*, in 1997. He has served as an informal advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson, George C. Wallace, President Ronald Reagan, and Robert Kennedy.

Evers has seven children; Patricia Murchinson, Charlene Evers-Kreel, Carolyn Crockell, Shelia Evers

Blackmond, Yvonne Evers, Wanda Evers and Rachel Evers.

Evers was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 24, 2017.

Evers passed away on July 22, 2020.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles Evers was conducted by Denise Gines on May 24, 2017, in Jackson, Mississippi, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic activist and political leader Charles Evers (1922 -2020) the brother of slain civil rights leader, Medgar Evers, was the first African American mayor elected in Mississippi post-Reconstruction era.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Evers, Charles, 1922-2020

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Evers, Charles, 1922-2020 --Interviews

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# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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# Occupations:

Civic Activist

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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# 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 Charles Evers, May 24, 2017. 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).

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# 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.

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# Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers, Section A2017\_105\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:21 ?  
Charles Evers was born on September 11, 1922 in Decatur, Mississippi to Jesse Wright Evers and James Evers. His parents were both born near Forest,

Mississippi, and settled in Decatur after marrying. Evers' father managed a team of lumber stackers who worked at the local sawmills, while Evers' mother raised Evers and his siblings, Medgar Evers, Mary Ruth Evers and Elizabeth Evers Jordan. Their family belonged to the Church of God in Christ. Evers attended the segregated Decatur Consolidated School and Newton High School, and stacked lumber with his father after class. He also worked for his uncle, Mark Thomas, who owned a funeral home. Evers left home at fourteen years old, and worked as a farmhand with his friend, blues musician B.B. King. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942, and served as a combat engineer in the South Pacific. While stationed in the Philippines, he developed a close relationship with a woman named Felicia, but they were unable to marry due to U.S. laws against interracial relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers, Section A2017\_105\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:45 ?

Charles Evers grew up in Decatur, Mississippi during the 1920s and 1930s. He witnessed the lynching of community leader Willie Tingle at the county fairgrounds, and he was sexually harassed by a white female coworker while working in a restaurant. He escaped the South by enlisting in the U.S. Army during World War II. After returning from his deployment, Evers earned a degree from Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lorman, Mississippi. He began managing his uncle's funeral home in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and also worked as a deejay on WHOC Radio. During this time, Evers and his brother, Medgar Evers, became involved with the NAACP. They organized voter registration drives alongside activists like Aaron Henry, Winson Hudson, C.C. Bryant and Dr. Gilbert R. Mason, Sr. After encouraging African Americans to vote on WHOC Radio, Evers faced severe backlash from the white community. He was fined \$75,000 for creating a disturbance, and fled to Chicago, Illinois shortly afterwards.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers, Section A2017\_105\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:15 ?

Charles Evers and his brother, Medgar Evers, assisted with the NAACP investigation of Emmett Till's murder in 1955. Two years later, Evers moved to Chicago, Illinois. He made a living through bootlegging, numbers running and prostitution, and maintained connections with civil rights activists in Mississippi. In 1963, Medgar Evers was assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan. In response, Evers returned to Mississippi with his security enforcer Rudy Shields, and dedicated himself to the Civil Rights Movement. Evers assumed his brother's role as the director of the Mississippi NAACP, despite some objections from the national leadership. Evers refused to use nonviolent methods, but he developed a close relationship with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and participated in the March on Washington and the Selma to Montgomery March alongside John Lewis. Evers also befriended the Kennedy family, and was accompanying Robert F. Kennedy at the time of his assassination in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers, Section A2017\_105\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:51 ?

Charles Evers was elected mayor of Fayette, Mississippi in 1969. He campaigned on a Democratic platform, and his slogan encouraged the participation of black voters. Evers was the first African American mayor of the majority-black town since Reconstruction, and was named man of the year by the NAACP. In 1971, he campaigned for governorship of Mississippi, but lost to William Waller. In 1978, he ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Senate. Despite his close friendship with the Kennedy family, Evers was ambivalent about the Democratic Party due to its history of support for southern segregation. He eventually switched his affiliation to the Republican Party, and served as an advisor to President Richard Nixon, President Ronald Reagan and President

George Herbert Walker Bush. In this capacity, he traveled to Dakar, Senegal with Maureen Reagan. Evers completed his final term as mayor of Fayette in 1989. He then became the general manager of WMPR Radio in Jackson, Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Evers, Section A2017\_105\_001\_005, TRT: 5:18:58 ?

Charles Evers became the general manager of WMPR Radio in Jackson, Mississippi in the late 1980s. To consolidate his control of the station, he immediately terminated the previous staff, and eventually replaced the original board of directors. At the time of the interview, WMPR Radio was managed by Evers and his daughters, Wanda Evers and Velma “Charlene” Evers Kreel. The radio station aired music, religious programs and talk shows, including a program hosted by Evers and another hosted by Mississippi state senator John Horhn. Evers supported President Donald John Trump in the 2016 election. He reflects upon his legacy and family, and shares a message to future generations. Evers concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.