

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Burke, Yvonne Brathwaite |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, |
| Dates: | July 23, 2001 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2001 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:09). |
| Abstract: | U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (1932 -) was the first African American woman elected to the United States Congress from California, representing the 63rd Assembly District of California. Burke was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 23, 2001, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2001_005 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

In the course of her long public service career, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke has made significant contributions to improve the quality of life for minorities, women and the poor. Burke's college education began at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1949. She transferred to the University of California, Los Angeles, in her junior year. In 1956, Burke received her J.D. from the University of Southern California Law School, graduating in the top third of her class. In law school, when Burke was refused admission to the women's law society, she and two Jewish female law students started a rival organization. She also played a key role in organizing a legal defense team for those charged in the Watts Riots in 1965 and was soon appointed by the governor to the McCone Commission to investigate the causes of the riots.

Burke's political career began in 1966 with her election as the first African American assemblywoman, representing the 63rd Assembly District of California. She served for three terms. Throughout her tenure in the California legislature, she was an ardent supporter of prison reform, childcare, equal opportunities for minorities and women, and education. Burke grew frustrated with the unresponsiveness of the state legislature and successfully campaigned for a seat in California's 37th Congressional District in 1973. This gave Burke the distinction of being the first African American female elected to the U.S. Congress from California.

Burke served as Los Angeles County supervisor for the Second District, a position she has held since 1992. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, Burke has focused her efforts on improving the lives of children, encouraging economic development and improving transportation in Los Angeles. Burke held this position until her retirement in 2008.

Burke has amassed numerous distinctions and honors throughout her public service career. She became the first African American female to serve as chairperson of the L.A. County Board of Supervisors in 1993. She was vice

chairperson of the 1972 Democratic National Convention, past chairman of the L.A. Federal Reserve Bank and vice chairman of the 1984 U.S. Olympics Organizing Committee. *Time* named Burke one of America's 200 Future Leaders, and she was selected Woman of the Year by both the *Los Angeles Times* and UCLA.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 23, 2001, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke (1932 -) was the first African American woman elected to the United States Congress from California, representing the 63rd Assembly District of California.

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:

Burke, Yvonne Brathwaite

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burke, Yvonne Brathwaite--Interviews

African American women lawyers--California--Interviews.

African American women politicians--California--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

California

Occupations:

U.S. Congresswoman

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, July 23, 2001. 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 Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Section A2001_005_001_001, TRT: 0:30:06 ?

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke gives details of her family history. She tells of how her parents met and eventually ended up in Los Angeles, California. She mentions some hard times the family went through including a union strike and racial discrimination. Nonetheless, Brathwaite Burke managed to have a fruitful childhood as she was constantly involved with a number of lessons, educational programs and family outings. Burke explains her journey through the ranks of education. She also discusses the social climate in Los Angeles during her childhood. She gives many details and tells stories that give insight into what the city was like for a young African American girl.

African American families.

African American parents--Race discrimination--California--Los Angeles.

Childhood and youth--Education.

Los Angeles (Ca.)--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Section A2001_005_001_002, TRT: 0:29:09 ?

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke meets attorney Loren Miller at age fifteen and is greatly impressed by his scholarly attitude. This meeting solidifies her decision to become a lawyer. She attends the University of California at Berkeley for her undergraduate studies and tells of some hard times she had adjusting to college life. Her positive personality and determination get her through this period. Brathwaite Burke discusses some of the jobs she held while in college. In particular, her experience as a model brings out some humorous as well as some racially significant stories. With the help of her mother she is accepted into the University of Southern California's Law School even though the school does not usually accept African-Americans. After a few years at USC Brathwaite Burke graduates and accepts a job with the State of California. Even though she faces barriers of gender discrimination she makes great strides at the beginning of her career. After a discussing the meeting of her first husband, Brathwaite Burke explains why she left her job with the State of California to pursue other avenues of law.

University of California, Berkeley.

Models (Persons)

University of Southern California. Law School.

Discrimination in the workplace.

Miller, Loren.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Section A2001_005_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke discusses the social climate and hardships she encountered in 1968. Her campaigns for the California legislature and Congress are discussed in great depth and she tells numerous stories of people she met along the way including Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Barbara Jordan. Once elected to Congress, she experiences Washington D.C.'s media backlash but pushes ahead in an effort to make her Congressional career successful. Brathwaite Burke details her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, from her opinion on the importance of lawyers in

Civil Rights, to working with the various organizations at the time.
Political campaigns.
King, Martin Luther, 1899-1984
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.
Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968.
Jordan, Barbara, 1936-1996.
Civil rights movement.
United States. Congress.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Section
A2001_005_001_004, TRT: 0:30:08 ?

Besides being one of the only African American women U.S. Representatives, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke was also the only one with a child. She speaks of the adjustments she needed to make when she worked in Congress. While there, she puts a great deal of effort into leading the Congressional Black Caucus and is highly successful in getting their foundation financially off the ground. Equally important, she takes laws such as Affirmative Action and brings them to into the public eye, usually passing these bills with ease. Brathwaite Burke reaches many milestones but never takes any for granted. As she looks at the situation that African Americans are in at the present time she is amazed at the variety of opportunities. However, she is concerned with the future of African Americans in politics. She believes that the role is still an extremely worthy and necessary job, although she doesn't see the motivation in the younger generations that she hoped she would.

Congressional Black Caucus.
Minorities--United States. Congress.
Affirmative action programs--California.
Minorities--Political activity.
African American leadership--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Section
A2001_005_001_005, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke is speaks of her interests and hobbies, some of which she enjoys with her husband. Continuing in the non-public vein she discusses her hopes for her children and reveals that she would like to see her daughter Autumn run for office one day. Brathwaite Burke explains her attitude that she can do anything she sets her mind to and how this attitude has rubbed off on others. In describing her legacy she is proud to say that she has inspired other to reach their dreams in life. Yvonne Brathwaite Burke narrates photos that span her career. Photos include the likes of Martin Luther King Jr., Hillary Rodham Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Henry Kissinger and many others.

Vocational guidance.
Photographs.
African American families.
Mothers and daughters.