

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James W. Compton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Compton, James, 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton,
Dates:	May 16, 2002, November 5, 2001 and November 8, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001 and 2002
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:15:55).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive James W. Compton (1938 -) was the Executive Director of the Chicago Urban League and president and CEO of the League's Board of Directors. Under his guidance, the Chicago Urban League was restructured to better provide direct care, advocacy, and research in the areas of community empowerment, education, employment, and social services. Compton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 16, 2002, November 5, 2001 and November 8, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_015
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader James Compton was born on April 7, 1938, in Aurora, Illinois. After finishing high school, he went on to Morehouse College where he worked for the legendary educator Dr. Benjamin Mays, then president of the college. Mays inspired young Compton's interest in civil rights and equality and played a major role in Compton's decision to major in political science. While at Morehouse, Compton broadened his horizons by spending a summer in Soviet block countries and later, with the prestigious Merrill Fellowship, studying at the University of Grenoble in France. There, he received a diploma in French literature before graduating from Morehouse in 1961.

After college, Compton worked in the Chicago public school system for a number of years before beginning his long career with the Chicago Urban League. In 1965, Compton started as a counselor and employment representative for the Urban League's job training program. A few years later, he moved to upstate New York to run the Urban League's office in Binghamton before returning to Chicago in 1972 as the Executive Director of the Chicago Urban League. Though the Urban League was operating under a huge deficit, Compton was able to garner tremendous community support, turning the organization around in a relatively short period of time. In 1978, Compton became President and CEO of the League's Board of Directors. Under his guidance, the Chicago Urban League was restructured to better provide direct care, advocacy, and research in the areas of community empowerment, education, employment, and social services. Compton has been especially active regarding the issues of education, employment, and voter registration, and with his leadership, the League in 1975, became the first non-governmental agency authorized by the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners to register voters. Additionally, Compton is recognized as an expert in the area of community empowerment. He is consistently called upon to speak on everything from racial profiling to the demise of public housing. Compton is also President and CEO of the Chicago Urban League Development Corporation, an independent, not-for-profit organization created in 1983 to engage in economic development activities.

Compton sits on several boards and committees including: Ariel Mutual Funds, ComEd, the Field Museum of Natural History and the Northwestern University Board of Community Associates. He has also been honored with numerous awards and an honorary doctorate degree.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James W. Compton was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 16, 2002, November 5, 2001 and November 8, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive James W. Compton (1938 -) was the Executive Director of the Chicago Urban League and president and CEO of the League's Board of Directors. Under his guidance, the Chicago Urban League was restructured to better provide direct care, advocacy, and research in the areas of community empowerment, education, employment, and social services.

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:

Compton, James, 1938-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Compton, James, 1938---Interviews

African American executives--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago Urban League

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 James W. Compton, May 16, 2002, November 5, 2001 and November 8, 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 James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_001_001, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton begins by detailing his family history and childhood in Aurora, Illinois, describing a city segregated by race and class. Compton recalls never having a black teacher during his entire secondary school career. He also details the effect his father's death had on his childhood and family, as well as describing his childhood personality and aspirations.

African American families--Illinois--Aurora.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Aurora.

African Americans--Education--Illinois.

Death.

African Americans--Segregation--Illinois--Aurora.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_001_002, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton describes his junior high and high school years in Aurora, Illinois, highlighting his favorite activities and influential teachers. After graduating early, a fortuitous lecture by Dr. Benjamin Mays led Compton to apply to Morehouse College in Atlanta. Compton describes life as a Morehouse man, and shares some anecdotes from his campus life that illustrate values instilled at Morehouse.

Mentoring in education.

Education , Elementary--Illinois--Aurora.

Education, Secondary--Illinois--Aurora.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_001_003, TRT: 0:19:01 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton details his relationship with his mentor, Dr. Benjamin Mays, and shares anecdotes from his time at Morehouse College. Compton then details civil rights activism on Morehouse's campus in the 1950s, including his participation as president of the college's chapter of the NAACP.

Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

African American civil rights activists.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Mentoring in education--Georgia--Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_002_004, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton describes his photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_002_005, TRT: 0:31:28 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton describes his photographs.
Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_003_006, TRT:
0:30:02 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton continues to describe his experience at Morehouse College in Atlanta, reflecting on Dr. Benjamin Mays' leadership, describing his academic interests, and discussing his aspiration to enter foreign affairs after graduating. Compton explains why he chose instead to move back to Chicago and begin working the Chicago Urban League. He also details the history of the Urban League and comments on the influence of Bill Berry.

African American leadership.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.

Chicago Urban League.

Berry, Edwin C., 1910-1987.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_003_007, TRT:
0:31:20 ?

Urban League executive James Compton discusses the state of the Chicago Urban League during the 1960s and considers its accomplishments during that time. Compton also talks about black leadership during the 1960s, describing the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH. Compton then describes his move to Binghamton, New York, to work with the Broome County Urban League.

Chicago Urban League.

Operation PUSH (U.S.).

Minorities--Economic conditions.

African American leadership.

King, Martin Luther, 1899-1984.

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

National Urban League--Broome County (N.Y.).

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_003_008, TRT:
0:30:32 ?

Urban League executive James W. Compton continues to describe his experience at Morehouse College in Atlanta, reflecting on Dr. Benjamin Mays' leadership, describing his academic interests, and discussing his aspiration to enter foreign affairs after graduating. Compton explains why he chose instead to move back to Chicago and begin working the Chicago Urban League. He also details the history of the Urban League and comments on the influence of Bill Berry.

Chicago Urban League.

National Urban League--Broome County (N.Y.).

Minorities--Economic conditions.

African American leadership.

African Americans--Voter registration.

Video Oral History Interview with James W. Compton, Section A2001_015_003_009, TRT:
0:20:02 ?

Urban League executive James Compton discusses the state of the Chicago

Urban League during the 1960s and considers its accomplishments during that time. Compton also talks about black leadership during the 1960s, describing the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rev. Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH. Compton then describes his move to Binghamton, New York, to work with the Broome County Urban League.

Chicago Urban League.

Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.

Minorities--Economic conditions.

African American leadership.