

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Conyers, John, 1929-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.,
Dates:	April 24, 2001 and June 20, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:45:07).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable John Conyers, Jr. (1929 - 2019) was the longest-serving African American in the United States House of Representatives. Conyers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2001 and June 20, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_016
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Congressman John Conyers, Jr. was born in 1929, in Detroit, Michigan. After graduating from Detroit public schools, he earned his B.A. degree in 1957, and his J.D. degree in 1958, from Wayne State University. Before beginning a career as a private attorney, Conyers served one year in Korea as an officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and was awarded combat and merit citations.

In 1958, Conyers began his work in politics as an aide to Congressman John Dingell, whom he served until 1961. Conyers made history when he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1964 on a platform of jobs, justice and peace. During his years in Congress, social justice and economic opportunity have remained focal points of Conyers' platform.

The list of Conyers' legislative accomplishments is long and impressive. Some of the bills authored or sponsored by Conyers include the Martin Luther King Holiday Act, the Alcohol Warning Label Act, the National Voter Registration Act and the Hate Crime Statistics Act. As the first African American Democratic leader on the House Judiciary Committee, he attached crucial civil rights measures to the 1994 Omnibus Crime Bill, including the Racial Justice Act and the Police Accountability Act. Conyers generated the Justice Department's national study on police brutality, and he conducted hearings in several cities on police violence, racially motivated violence, sentencing, white-collar crime and other criminal justice matters.

Conyers was re-elected in November 2006, to his twenty-first term in the House, presenting Michigan's 14th Congressional District. His district includes Detroit and the Wayne County communities of Dearborn Heights, Pointe Shores, Grosse Pointe Woods, Harper Woods, Highland Park and Redford. Conyers is the longest-serving African American in the history of the House. He is the dean and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. Conyers also is a jazz aficionado and is responsible for jazz's classification as a national American

treasure.

Conyers is married to the former Monica Esters. Together they have raised two sons, John III and Carl Edward.

Conyers passed away on October 27, 2019.

John Conyers, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 24, 2001 and June 20, 2001.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 24, 2001 and June 20, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable John Conyers, Jr. (1929 - 2019) was the longest-serving African American in the United States House of Representatives.

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:

Conyers, John, 1929-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Haynes, Frank (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Conyers, John, 1929---Interviews

African American legislators--Michigan--Interviews.

African American politicians--Interviews.

Rural-urban migration.

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America.

Detroit (Mich.)--Riot, 1943.

Dingell, John D. (John David), 1894-1955.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Political campaigns--Michigan.

United States. Congress. House.

Colmer, William Meyers, b. 1890.

United States. Civil Rights Act of 1964

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Peace movements--United States.

United States. Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Congressional Black Caucus.

Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994--Impeachment.

Clinton, Bill, 1946--Impeachment.

Thomas, Clarence, 1948-.

Powell, A. Clayton (Adam Clayton), 1908-1972.

Jazz.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Michigan

Occupations:

U.S. Congressman

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 John Conyers, Jr., April 24, 2001 and June 20, 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 John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_001_001, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

John Conyers discusses his parents' Southern roots and the circumstances that led each of them to make the Great Migration north to Detroit, where they met and married. Conyers's father found work in the auto industry and became one of the early organizers of the United Auto Workers of America (UAW) union. Conyers was greatly influenced by his father's interest in reading, and his commitment to social justice. Conyers shares a memory of his father nearly becoming caught up in the 1943 Detroit Race Riot. He also recalls the auto industry's segregated baseball leagues. As a teenager, Conyers developed an interest in jazz, playing trumpet in local bands.

African American legislators--Michigan--Interviews.

African American politicians--Interviews.

Rural-urban migration.

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America.

Detroit (Mich.)--Riot, 1943.

Dingell, John D. (John David), 1894-1955.

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Jazz.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_001_002, TRT: 0:30:36 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers reflects on the influences and decisions involved in his educational and career aspirations as an adolescent and young adult. While working days, he went to night school, first taking the extra science and math courses he needed to get into college, then attending Wayne State University, until being drafted. After returning from the Korean War, Conyers began to consider law school as a means to working for social justice. In his final year of law school, Conyers took a job as a worker's compensation referee in the office of Congressman John Dingell; while in this position he was one of

three representatives from Michigan invited to Washington to meet with President John Kennedy for the formation of the National Committee for Lawyers for Civil Rights. This experience and others, Conyers believes, were gradually shaping his career direction and his eventual decision to run for public office.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_001_003, TRT: 0:11:25 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers (Democrat, Michigan.) talks about his experiences in the Army, in which he served behind the lines in the Korean War. He also had a chance during that time to see more of the United States. While in Korea he began to question the purpose of the war and to think about the larger political issues.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_002_004, TRT: 0:31:19 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers talks about his job as a third year law student working in the Detroit, Michigan office of Congressman John Dingell -- a great experience both legally and in gaining exposure to the legislative process. His experience working for Dingell, his involvement in several high profile civil rights cases, and his participation in the Lawyers' Commission for Civil Rights Under Law established by President John F. Kennedy made him feel he had the qualifications to run for Congress. His platform, he says, was based on jobs, justice and peace. As a candidate opposed to the Vietnam War, he received support from anti-war groups. He mentions several major supporters, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the labor movement and the churches. Their support and the hard work he and others put in on his campaign resulted in his narrow victory.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_002_005, TRT: 0:29:22 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers recalls his early experiences in Congress, where he was only the seventh African American representative to serve in that office. He reveals his maneuverings to get appointed to the Judiciary Committee. He describes how Southern congressmen such as William Colmer blocked all efforts at civil rights legislation for years until finally in 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed, followed the next year by the Voting Rights Act. He talks about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; four days later Conyers introduced a bill to make King's birthday a national holiday, a goal that would end up taking decades to accomplish. Conyers also speaks about his position against the Vietnam War and the spread of anti-war sentiment in the country.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_002_006, TRT: 0:30:03 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers talks about the formation of the Congressional Black Caucus, mentioning the initial lack of enthusiasm from senior African American legislator Adam Clayton Powell; Conyers says that Powell saw himself as the representative of all black people. Conyers details some of the accomplishments of the CBC--including the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the "Motor Voter" Act, funding for black medical schools, support for black farmers and funding to fight the international pandemic of AIDS. He reflects on other current events, such as the call for reparations for slavery.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_002_007, TRT: 0:30:39 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers (Democrat, Michigan) compares the two

efforts at presidential impeachment that occurred during his congressional career -- Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton He criticizes right-wing African American Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas for his performance when heading the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission and for his voting record since joining the Court. Conyers discusses the 2000 Presidential election and how the outcome was affected by the controversial voting issues in Florida. Conyers also strongly criticizes the "War on Drugs" as being targeted mainly at the low-level dealers and addicts in minority neighborhoods, while having been ineffective in stopping the flow of drugs into the country.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John Conyers, Jr., Section A2001_016_002_008, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

U.S. Congressman John Conyers continues to share his love of jazz music and relates his efforts as a congressman to support and promote jazz, including his sponsorship of Joint Concurrent Resolution HR57, which declared jazz to be a unique American treasure. He praises the efforts of musician Wynton Marsalis and filmmaker Ken Burns in promoting education about jazz. He talks about the huge international impact jazz has had and the great respect accorded to jazz musicians in other countries. He talks about the music of John Coltrane and recalls concerts he saw and a meeting with Coltrane.