

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Gus Savage

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Savage, Gus
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 16, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:01:11).
<b>Abstract:</b>	U.S. congressman The Honorable Gus Savage (1925 - 2015 ) was a forceful voice for equality and represented the state of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1980 to 1990. Savage served as the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Economic Development. From 1965 to 1980, Gus Savage was one of Chicago's most influential black journalists, as the owner of the Citizen newspapers, a chain of community weeklies. Savage was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_068
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born October 30, 1925 in Detroit, Michigan, Gus Savage and his family moved to the South Side of Chicago five years later. Savage recalls a childhood spent in abject poverty and cramped quarters in a Chicago neighborhood that was a chief battleground in the city's racial turf wars. In this environment he was lured by gangs, violence, and gambling. After high school he entered the U.S. Army and

was sent to the South for training, and it was in the South that Savage experienced first hand virulent anti-black racism. His experiences there led him away from his past gang activity and towards a renewed Christian faith, activity in the Civil Rights Movement and a burgeoning intellectual curiosity.

Savage was honorably discharged from the service and returned to Chicago, where, in 1950, he enrolled in Roosevelt University. Three years later, he graduated with a B.A. in philosophy. After graduating, he went on to Chicago-Kent College of Law, and began to involve himself politically. He worked on Henry Wallace's 1948 Progressive Party campaign for the Presidency and picketed city hall for housing opportunities for blacks.

From 1965 to 1980, Gus Savage was one of Chicago's most influential black journalists, as the owner of the Citizen newspapers, a chain of community weeklies in the Chicago area. During this time, he became a forceful voice for equality and black liberation, leading campaigns against the Chicago political machine for equal housing access and civil rights. In 1977, he managed Harold Washington's first unsuccessful bid for mayor and many credit him for paving the way for Washington's successful bid, six years later. Having routinely run unsuccessfully in local and congressional elections, Savage's 1980 campaign for Congress was generally viewed as a long shot. Savage stunned the political establishment in both the Democratic primary and the general election and was elected to the U.S. House Representatives from Illinois' Second District. During his decade in Congress, Savage continued to be a strong voice for equality and minority advancement, serving as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Economic Development and Chairman of the Minority Business Braintrust of the Congressional Black Caucus. He also served on the House Committee on Small Business and on Public Works and Transportation, and was able to bring a \$153 million to Chicago.

Savage passed away on October 31, 2015.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Gus Savage was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 16, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable Gus Savage (1925 - 2015 ) was a forceful voice for equality and represented the state of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1980 to 1990. Savage served as the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Economic

Development. From 1965 to 1980, Gus Savage was one of Chicago's most influential black journalists, as the owner of the Citizen newspapers, a chain of community weeklies.

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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:**

Savage, Gus

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Savage, Gus--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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Illinois

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## **Occupations:**

U.S. Congressman

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Gus Savage, April 16, 2001. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 The Honorable Gus Savage, Section A2001\_068\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:16 2001/04/16

Gus Savage briefly describes his parents and his hardscrabble youth in Chicago. He details his change in life goals after being drafted into the Army during World War II. He explains exposure to middle class black males at the Tuskegee Institute helped propel him on the road to seeking social justice and change, which led to his work on political campaigns and in journalism. Savage also recalls his participation in demonstrations against discrimination in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage, Section A2001\_068\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:04 2001/04/16

Gus Savage details his various journalism positions held with the 'Nation of Islam', the 'Citizen' and many of his political endeavors. Savage discusses his various attempts to break the back of the Chicago Machine through upstart political movements, demonstrations and journalistic advocacy. Throughout, Savage highlights the strategies he

used to battle against the establishment. Finally, Savage details his efforts to elect black candidates to political offices in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage, Section A2001\_068\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:02 2001/04/16

Gus Savage gives a detailed account of the role race plays in politics, especially in Chicago Democratic Machine politics. Savage explains how he helped to promote the interests of African Americans, and gives his opinions on various black politicians in Chicago, including those who were Independents. He details the rise of Harold Washington as a political Independent after running for mayor of Chicago in 1977. Savage then discusses Washington's tenure as mayor.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage, Section A2001\_068\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:18 2001/04/16

Gus Savage gives a detailed account of the political machinations which led to the breaking of the Richard J. Daley-led Chicago Democratic Machine. He explains how Daley's unexpected death and vacated office opened a window of opportunity for black independents to make their move into city hall. Savage says the independents were thwarted by black establishment politicians, whom Savage frequently criticizes over the course of the interview. Savage delves into his relationship with Harold Washington and explains how he helped usher in new black congressmen, including himself. Savage concludes by recalling his U.S. Congressional career.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage, Section A2001\_068\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:28 2001/04/16

Gus Savage shares several anecdotes from his U.S. Congressional tenure, notably passing affirmative action legislation, his intervention to preserve a slave burial ground in New York City, and the building and naming of a new federal courthouse in Chicago after Ralph Metcalfe. He explains in great technical detail the inner workings of Congressional committees and how legislation is really passed. Savage then comments extensively on the conflict in the Middle East and Israel, and explains his opposition to military funding for Israel.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gus Savage, Section  
A2001\_068\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:03 2001/04/16

Gus Savage voices his opinions on various problems that afflict black Americans and shares his solutions. Savage believes the answer does not lie in electoral politics, and emphasizes the importance of creating a self-sustaining black economic model which isn't reliant on the white power structure. Savage also comments on integration and reparations, highlighting the negative consequences for African Americans. Finally, Savage considers his legacy and the future of the black community.