

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bishop John Burgess

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Burgess, John, 1909-2003
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bishop John Burgess,
Dates:	August 12, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	2 Betacame SP videocassettes (0:43:42).
Abstract:	Bishop John Burgess (1909 - 2003) was the first African American Episcopalian Bishop, was the chaplain of Howard University, and was named a canon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Burgess also worked extensively with urban ministry in Boston. Burgess was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 12, 2003, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_180
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Bishop John Burgess was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on March 11, 1909. He attended the University of Michigan, earning a B.A. in 1930, and an M.A. in 1931. Burgess went on to the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduating in 1934, and he became an ordained minister in 1935.

He began his career by serving the African American working classes of Michigan and Ohio after World War II. He started at his home parish of St. Phillip's Church and was later given charge of St. Simon of Cyrene, a mission church that served a Cincinnati neighborhood in abject poverty. In 1946, Burgess became the Episcopalian chaplain of Howard University, where he served for ten years. In 1951, Burgess was named a canon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. During his five years there, he often spoke of civil rights issues, using the national pulpit to his advantage. After leaving Howard and the National Cathedral, Burgess went to Boston, where he took a post as archdeacon of the city's missions and parishes and worked to improve the urban ministry of the church there. In 1962, Burgess was made a bishop suffragan, and in 1970, he became the first African American bishop of the Episcopal Church. Under his leadership, he instituted a number of programs that sought to make the church more inclusive of minorities and give the congregations more of a voice, and he established the Joint Urban Fund, which gives money to local groups fighting poverty. He retired in 1975.

After his retirement, Burgess was honored with more than a dozen honorary degrees, and he went to Yale's Berkeley Divinity School to teach and serve as interim dean. He also served as chairman of St. Augustine's College in North Carolina.

Burgess passed away on August 24, 2003 at age of 94.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bishop John Burgess was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 12, 2003, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 2 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bishop John Burgess (1909 - 2003) was the first African American Episcopalian Bishop, was the chaplain of Howard University, and was named a canon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Burgess also worked extensively with urban ministry in Boston.

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:

Burgess, John, 1909-2003

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Burgess, John, 1909-2003--Interviews

African American bishops--Interviews.

African American Episcopalians--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Episcopal Church.

Occupations:

Bishop

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Bishop John Burgess, August 12, 2003. 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 Bishop John Burgess, Section A2003_180_001_001, TRT: 0:12:30 ?

Bishop John Burgess' photographs are narrated by his wife, Julia Esther Burgess.
African American bishops--Interviews.
African American Episcopalians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Bishop John Burgess, Section A2003_180_001_002, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Bishop John Burgess was born on March 11, 1909 to Lucy Rusink Burgess and Theodore Burgess. He was raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan where he attended Henry Street School and Central High School. He graduated from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1930. He went back to minister at his childhood church, St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Grand Rapids. His next church was St. Simon of Cyrene Episcopal Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. From 1946 through 1956, Burgess was the Episcopal chaplain at Howard University in Washington, D.C., during which time Mordecai Johnson was president of Howard. In 1970, he was installed as the Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts. Burgess met his wife, Esther Julia Burgess, while at a conference at St. Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. The couple has two daughters. Burgess is a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and was active in the University of Michigan Club in D.C. Burgess reflects upon his legacy. He was in hospice at the time of this interview.