

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hawkins, Augustus F.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins,
Dates:	September 12, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:01:00).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (1907 - 2007) served in the California State Assembly for twenty-eight years and then for another twenty-eight years in the U.S. House of Representatives. Hawkins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_255
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Augustus "Gus" Hawkins was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on August 31, 1907. Moving to Los Angeles with his family in 1918 to escape prejudice, Hawkins attended public schools. After graduating high school in 1926, Hawkins attended the University of California, Los Angeles, earning his A.B. degree in economics in 1931. He went on to take graduate level courses from the University of Southern California's Institute of Government.

In his first attempt at political office, Hawkins won election to the California State Assembly in 1934, upsetting an incumbent of sixteen years. During the twenty-eight years he served, he authored more than 100 laws and rose to the position of chairman of the Rules Committee. His legislation resulted in African Americans being appointed as judges and state commissioners, and he also championed for the rights of the poor, such as his Fair Housing Act and old age pensions. In 1962, Hawkins was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he would serve until 1990. During his tenure, he continued to champion equal rights and also pressed for legislation to protect youth with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. Hawkins also helped push through the Minority Institutional Aid Act, which gave financial aid to traditional minority colleges, and was the author of the Full Employment Act.

Over the course of his career, Hawkins authored more than 300 laws and succeeded in restoring an honorable discharge to the 170 black soldiers of the 25th Infantry Regiment who were falsely accused of a public disturbance in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906, and removed from the U.S. Army.

Hawkins and his wife, Elsie, lived in Los Angeles until his death on November 10, 2007. Hawkins was 100 years old.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins (1907 - 2007) served in the California State Assembly for twenty-eight years and then for another twenty-eight years in the U.S. 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:

Hawkins, Augustus F.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hawkins, Augustus F.--Interviews

African American legislators--United States--Interviews

African American state legislators--California--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

California

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 Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, September 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 The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Section A2003_255_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins was born on August 31, 1907 in Shreveport, Louisiana to Hattie Helena Freeman and Nyanza Hawkins. His paternal grandfather explored Africa in the late 19th century. Hawkins addresses his historical legacy and current issues before talking about his childhood in Shreveport, Louisiana where he grew up in a mixed religious and political household. His father worked as a pharmacist, and his mother took care of the five children. In recalling the sights and sounds of his childhood, he describes his mother as a unifier, and he recalls experiences of riding public transportation. In 1918, the Hawkins family moved to Los Angeles, California. Hawkins developed a love for the outdoors on the West Coast, and he began attending public schools.

African American legislators--United States--Interviews.

African American state legislators--California--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Section A2003_255_001_002, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins describes Los Angeles, California in the early 20th century. Fraternal lodges and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] dominated civil rights activities. Hawkins attended Thomas Jefferson High School, a primarily white school, in Los Angeles. Despite the entrance of black students, the racial dynamics of the Los Angeles Public School system favored whites who continued to control leadership positions. Hawkins graduated from the University of California Los Angeles [UCLA] in 1931. The racial politics of Los Angeles compelled him to become involved in the local political scene. During the early 1930s, he developed an interest in labor organizing and participated in a campaign to oust Representative Frederick Madison Roberts from state office. Hawkins won Roberts' seat in the California State Assembly in 1934.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Section A2003_255_001_003, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins describes his 1934 campaign for the California State Assembly. Hawkins ran on a pro-labor platform. The popularity of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped Hawkins defeat Representative Frederick Madison Roberts. During his early years in the California State Assembly, he focused on civil rights issues such as outlawing restrictive covenants and increasing black representation in civil service positions. Hawkins describes his relationship with the black community and his college friendships with Ralph Bunche and Newell Eason. Hawkins considers the establishment of childcare centers and the Fair Employment Practices Commission [FEPC] his greatest legislative achievements. He opposed the internment of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins, Section A2003_255_001_004, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

The Honorable Augustus F. "Gus" Hawkins served as the only non-white member of the California State Assembly when first elected. After serving for twenty-eight years at the state level, he ran for Congress in 1962 with the backing of President John F. Kennedy. Hawkins details how education and employment legislation became his primary interests. As a member of the House Education and Labor Committee, he supported many of President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society programs. In 1973, Hawkins sponsored the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, and in 1978, he co-authored the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act with Senator Hubert Humphrey. A founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, he discusses how the

group should play a larger role in congressional legislation. Hawkins desires to be remembered as an advocate for equal education.