

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Calvin Burnett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Burnett, Calvin, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Calvin Burnett,
Dates:	September 10, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:18:25).
Abstract:	College president Calvin Burnett (1932 -) led Coppin State College for thirty-two years. Under his presidency, Coppin was transformed from primarily a teacher training college to a school offering more than twenty diverse programs, including a nursing school. Burnett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 10, 2003, in Westminster, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_256
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Longtime president of Coppin State College, Calvin W. Burnett was born in Brinkley, Arkansas, in 1932, but grew up in Davenport, Iowa. After graduating from high school, Burnett attended St. Louis University, where he received his bachelor's degrees in biology and political science. Burnett remained with St. Louis University after graduation to earn his PhD degree in social psychology.

Burnett began his career as a research social psychologist at St. Louis Hospital, and later served as the director of research at the Health and Welfare Council of

Saint Louis. From there, he began his instructional and administrative path, teaching first at the Catholic University of America and later at Southern Illinois University. In 1970, Burnett was named president of Coppin State College, and he remained there until his retirement in 2002. Under his leadership, Coppin was transformed from primarily a teacher training college to a school offering more than twenty diverse programs, including a nursing school. Admissions increased from 1,100 to more than 4,000 and successfully kept the school independent when Morgan State University attempted to merge in 1991.

Burnett has also given his time to a number of community and civic organizations, serving on the board of the State of Maryland Civil Rights Commission, acting as past president of the Baltimore Area Boy Scouts of America, and chairing the state NAACP Jubilee Committee. He has appeared in several editions of *Who's Who*, been awarded the Outstanding Educator in America in 1971, and received the Fullwood Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001.

He is married to Gretta L. Burnett, who is also an educator. He has four grown children and four grandchildren. His personal interests include existential philosophy, classical and jazz music, and gardening.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Calvin Burnett was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 10, 2003, in Westminster, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. College president Calvin Burnett (1932 -) led Coppin State College for thirty-two years. Under his presidency, Coppin was transformed from primarily a teacher training college to a school offering more than twenty diverse programs, including a nursing school.

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:

Burnett, Calvin, 1932-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burnett, Calvin, 1932---Interviews

African American college presidents--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews

African American psychologists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Coppin State College

Occupations:

College President

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Calvin Burnett, September 10, 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 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).

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 Calvin Burnett, Section
A2003_256_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/09/10

Calvin Burnett was born on March 16, 1932 outside of Brinkley, Arkansas. His mother, Vera Rayford, was born in 1915 in Memphis, Tennessee. Rayford's parents separated when she was young. Her difficult work experiences from a young age as a farmhand and factory worker took a toll on Vera Rayford, and likely contributed to her early death in 1962. Burnett's father, Elmer Burnett, was born in 1914 in Brinkley, Arkansas. He was a teacher at the Fargo Agricultural School in Fargo, Arkansas. Calvin Burnett recalls his early childhood in Brinkley, Arkansas, when he became very close with his paternal grandmother, Minnie Burnett. After his parents separated, Burnett moved to Davenport, Iowa with his mother and stepfather, an alcoholic. In Davenport, he was a multi-sport athlete and graduated from Davenport High School in 1950. Burnett then abandoned his original plan to join the U.S. Army and enrolled in college at the urging of an influential English teacher and his grandmother.

African American college presidents--Maryland--
Baltimore--Interviews.

African American psychologists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin Burnett, Section
A2003_256_001_002, TRT: 0:29:55 2003/09/10

Calvin Burnett attended Davenport High School in Davenport, Iowa. As a student, Burnett worked as a pin setter at a bowling alley and also played basketball. During his senior year, Burnett's mother and stepfather

moved away, and Burnett fended for himself before a benefactor stepped in to pay his rent. After graduating in 1950, he went to Grambling State University in Louisiana where he played basketball under Coach Eddie Robinson, later a Hall of Fame college football coach. Living in Louisiana under segregation was dispiriting to Burnett, and after his freshman year he returned to Iowa. He was then drafted into the U.S. Army, in which he played for the post basketball team. After two years of service, Burnett enrolled at Saint Louis University in Missouri. He played for four years as a center on the Saint Louis basketball team, against stars like Wilt Chamberlain and Oscar Robertson. Burnett describes his decision to pursue social psychology and his engagement in the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin Burnett, Section
A2003_256_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30 2003/09/10

Calvin Burnett describes the racial tensions at away games when he was a player on the Saint Louis University (SLU) basketball team during the 1950s. During one season, SLU was invited to play in a tournament in New Orleans on the condition that Burnett would not play. The university cancelled the game, but Burnett was still subjected to verbal and even physical abuse from fans at away games in the South. After graduating from SLU with a Ph.D. degree in social psychology in 1963, Burnett was a research director at the Health and Welfare Council for three years before teaching at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He then spent a year at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville before he was named the president of Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland in 1970. His early years there involved a wary relationship with the Black Power Movement. Burnett held a public debate with a student leader to decide whether banners showing socialist leaders would be displayed at the Coppin State cafeteria.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin Burnett, Section
A2003_256_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/09/10

Calvin Burnett recounts the history of Coppin State University, a historically black college (HBCU) in Baltimore, Maryland and describes the years that he spent

as its president from 1970 to 2003. Coppin State University was founded in 1900 to train black teachers for public schools in the City of Baltimore. It took its name from Fannie Jackson Coppin, one of the first African American women to receive an undergraduate degree. During Burnett's term as president, Coppin State's student body grew from eleven hundred to four thousand. Burnett also initiated programs in fields such as nursing, criminal justice and rehabilitation counseling. The Maryland legislature and Burnett battled over funding for Coppin State, and Burnett feels that other Maryland HBCUs often received more state support. However, under Burnett's leadership, Coppin State has always received accreditation, and has been able to increase its community engagement, especially in the fields of healthcare and education.

Video Oral History Interview with Calvin Burnett, Section
A2003_256_001_005, TRT: 0:20:50 2003/09/10

Calvin Burnett describes his final years as president of Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland, in the 1990s and early 2000s. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights investigated matters at Coppin State as a part of their efforts to correct the vestiges of segregation in higher education. As a result of this investigation, a taskforce appointed by the State of Maryland reported that Coppin State was underfunded. When a new gubernatorial administration came into office in Maryland, Burnett worked with Lieutenant Governor Michael Steele to purchase vacant property on which Coppin State could expand. Burnett reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.