

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Bernard Parks

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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>	Parks, Bernard, 1943-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 31, 2014, March 31, 2005 and November 19, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004, 2005 and 2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:48:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Police chief and city council member The Honorable Bernard Parks (1943 - ) served as the Los Angeles chief of police from 1997 to 2002; during his tenure crime in Los Angeles fell by thirty-five percent. In 2002 Parks was elected to a seat on the Los Angeles City Council, where he worked to modernize the Los Angeles International Airport and to bring the National Football League back to Los Angeles. Parks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 31, 2014, March 31, 2005 and November 19, 2004, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_237
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Los Angeles city councilman Bernard Parks was born in Beaumont, Texas, on December 7, 1943; his family moved to Los Angeles while Parks was still young. While attending St. John Vianney High School, Parks played football and served as the class president. After graduating from high school, Parks attended Los Angeles City College from 1961 until 1963 before being hired at General Motors. Parks then enrolled in Los Angeles' police academy, and in February of 1965, was sworn in as an officer at a time that police cruisers were being desegregated.

Parks was promoted to sergeant in 1970. That same year, Parks also began attending Pepperdine University, where he earned his B.S. degree in 1976 in public management, and simultaneously earned his M.A. degree in public administration from the University of Southern California. While attending college, Parks was promoted to lieutenant, and in 1977, became a captain with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). By 1980, Parks was serving as commander, and in 1988, he was named deputy chief of police for Los Angeles. In 1992, Parks became assistant chief of police; two years later, following an institutional reorganization, Parks returned to the role of deputy chief. In August of 1997, Parks was named Los Angeles chief of police, a position he held until 2002.

In his various executive roles with the police department, Parks was responsible for overseeing task forces on anti-terrorism, internal affairs, and organized crime. As chief of police, Parks overhauled the department, initiating a community policing network; he also worked to stem corruption within the LAPD, sending former police officers to jail for gross violations of the law. During his tenure as chief of police, crime in Los Angeles fell by thirty-five percent.

After leaving the police department, Parks successfully ran in 2002 for a seat on the Los Angeles City Council. While serving in this office, Parks worked to modernize the Los Angeles International Airport and to bring the National Football League back to Los Angeles.

Parks is a member of several local, statewide and national law enforcement organizations, as well as a founding member of the Oscar Joel Bryant Foundation, which aims to foster growth and understanding between black police officers and their communities. Parks is an accomplished speaker and is widely considered to be an authority on criminal justice issues.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 31, 2014, March 31, 2005 and November 19, 2004, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Police chief and city council member The Honorable Bernard Parks (1943 - ) served as the Los Angeles chief of police from 1997 to 2002; during his tenure crime in Los Angeles fell by thirty-five percent. In 2002 Parks was elected to a seat on the Los Angeles City Council, where he worked to modernize the Los Angeles International Airport and to bring the National Football League back to Los Angeles.

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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:

Parks, Bernard, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Parks, Bernard, 1943---Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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Police chiefs--California--Los Angeles--Interviews

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City council members--California--Los Angeles--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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Los Angeles (Calif.). Police Dept.

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Los Angeles (Calif.). City Council.

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**Occupations:**

Police Chief

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City Council Member

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|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 Bernard Parks, July 31, 2014, March 31, 2005 and November 19, 2004. 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).

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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 Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks was born on December 7, 1942 in Beaumont, Texas. His mother, Gertrude Smith Parks, was born in Morrow, Louisiana in 1920. She was descended from the Metoyer family, a well-known family line started by a French general and an enslaved black woman in the Cane River area of Louisiana. Parks' father, Earl Parks, was born in 1921 to parents from Oklahoma and grew up in Watts, California, which was later incorporated in Los Angeles. Parks' mother was a waitress in Los Angeles; the restaurant she worked for did not hire African Americans, so she passed for white. Parks' father was a merchant seaman through World War II. He then became a harbor police officer in Los Angeles, and later worked for the housing authority police and the City of Los Angeles. In their respective workplaces, they had faced discrimination. Parks grew up in a house in Los Angeles with his three siblings, three cousins, aunts, parents, and grandparents. He attended St. Patrick's Catholic School.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Police chiefs--California--Los Angeles--Interviews.

City council members--California--Los Angeles--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks was the youngest of seven children in his household. As a child, he, his siblings, and cousins explored Los Angeles, sneaking into the Memorial Coliseum and riding their bicycles on the Harbor Freeway. Around 1958, the family moved to the mostly-white West Side, where he attended Holy Spirit Elementary School and St. John Vianney High School. He played football and ran track but was not particularly attentive to his grades. After graduating from high school, he attended Los Angeles City College for two years and played football there. He left school in 1962 and worked for General Motors for one year, after which he decided to join the Los Angeles Police Department. Though he was eligible to take exams, he could not enter the academy until he was twenty-one. In 1965, he completed police academy

courses and graduated thirteenth out of eighty-five. Parks recalls the department's racial tensions, both internally and with the community, and the 1966 police killing of Leonard Deadwyler.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_002\_003,  
TRT: 0:29:26 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks left the General Motors Plant in Los Angeles, California to enter the Los Angeles Police Department at the age of twenty-one. Parks and other black officers experienced many barriers within the LAPD; in addition to racial biases in the exam process, the department did not integrate police cars until the 1960s; black officers were barred from supervisory positions until that time as well. In addition to this de facto segregation, black officers also dealt with suspicion from the black community. Shortly after Parks joined the LAPD in 1965, the Watts Riots occurred. This shifted departmental policy, spreading black officers throughout the city rather than keeping them cloistered together. Parks rose through the ranks quickly. By the late 1960s, Parks was preparing to become a sergeant. His relationships with other black officers of rank, such as Joe Rouzan, aided him in his preparations. In the 1970s and 1980s, he continued his education, earning a B.A. degree and an M.A. degree.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_002\_004,  
TRT: 0:28:54 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks was promoted to sergeant in the Los Angeles Police Department in 1970. He was among the first group of black sergeants out in the field in a supervisory position. The upheaval of the late 1960s meant that police were dispatched to anti-war and civil rights protests and the demonstrations that followed the assassination of political figures, including Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King's murder inflamed racial tension within the department, with some white officers going as far as to call his assassination wonderful. In the 1970s, Parks earned his B.A. degree from Pepperdine University and his M.A. degree from University of Southern California. Parks continued to rise through the ranks, eventually becoming police chief. He let the officers he supervised know that he would not turn a blind eye to abuses of power; Parks also conveyed concerns that minority communities held regarding the effects of policing. He remembers the late Los Angeles mayor and former officer Tom Bradley.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_002\_005,  
TRT: 0:28:45 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks strongly supported community policing models as conceptualized by Los Angeles Police Chief Edward M. Davis. Davis assigned officers to the same locations in the city each day so that these sets of officers could establish a relationship with the public and increase cooperation between the community and the police. Community policing also used data about recidivist criminals to intervene and reduce crimes rather than simply relying on making arrests after the fact. Many officers misunderstood the point of community policing, sometimes deriding the efforts as "community relations" rather than recognizing its value in educating the public about crime prevention. Parks was promoted to police chief in Los Angeles, California in 1997. In that position, he worked to strengthen ties between the public and police. He remembers departmental scandals, including the 1992 beating of Rodney King and the Rampart scandal of the early 2000s, in which a dozen officers were indicted for corruption.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_003\_006,

TRT: 0:31:30 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks was promoted to police chief in Los Angeles, California in 1997, preceded by Willie L. Williams and Daryl Gates. Under Gates, the crime rate soared and the Rodney King beating in 1992 led to riots in the city. Parks was critical of the Los Angeles Police Department's handling of the beating and Gates' subsequent comments. Following Gates, Williams was hired from outside the department, which was uncommon. Parks was then promoted to chief under Mayor Richard Riordan. To curb the use of force by those under his command, Parks required keeping records of all complaints to establish which officer had patterns of abuse and what factors seemed to contribute to this behavior. He also disallowed supervisors from using discretion about which complaints were logged, mandating that all complaints be investigated. Parks describes the function and purview of the police within the criminal justice system, asserting that the police did not have the right to mete out punishment.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_003\_007, TRT: 7:27:27 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks was the police chief in Los Angeles, California when the city created the nation's first cold case homicide unit, which solved the case of a serial killer, Lonnie Franklin, dubbed the Grim Sleeper. During Parks' tenure, the Rampart scandal revealed that Officer Rafael Perez was stealing cocaine from evidence rooms. Perez confessed and offered four months' worth of testimony on other abuses of power. He implicated seventy officers, a dozen of whom were prosecuted, for offenses such as planting guns on people and robbing banks. With the department already under federal monitoring because of the 1992 Rodney King beating; the U.S. Department of Justice again intervened with a consent decree that mandated many actions that were redundant or costly. When James K. Hahn was elected mayor in 2001, he declined to rehire Parks. Parks was then elected representative of the city's Council District 8 in 2002. He reflects on the need for institutionalized reform in the police department.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Bernard Parks, Section A2004\_237\_003\_008, TRT: 8:21:48 ?

The Honorable Bernard Parks served as a city councilman for Los Angeles, California from 2002 to 2015. During that time, he served the 8th District, a predominantly African American area in South Central L.A. comprised of Baldwin Hills, Crenshaw, and Jefferson Park among other areas. Parks and his office created programming for their constituents, such as a festival honoring Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Christmas lighting ceremonies and toy drives. Parks' office also made efforts to develop deteriorated areas of the district that had been underserved and advocated plans that served both landlords and renters. Between his career in the Los Angeles Police Department and as a councilman, Parks gave L.A. fifty years of public service. He reflects on his career and philosophy of public service and details his hopes and concerns for the black community. Parks also considers HistoryMaker The Honorable Barack Obama's 2008 presidential election, his family, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.