

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cunningham, David S., 1935-2017
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr.,
Dates:	October 5, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:36:02).
Abstract:	City council member The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. (1935 - 2017) represented the Tenth District as a Los Angeles City Councilman, as well as serving as state chairman of the California Delegation to the Democratic National Committee in 1976. Later in his career, Cunningham formed Dave Cunningham and Associates, a public affairs consultant firm. Cunningham was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 5, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_231
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

California politician and consultant, David Surmier Cunningham, Jr., was born June 24, 1935, in Chicago, Illinois, to Eula Mae Lawson Cunningham and C.M.E. Rev. David S. Cunningham, Sr. At age eight, Cunningham accompanied his parents to Decatur, Illinois, where he attended E.A. Gastman Elementary School and enjoyed musical instruction at Millikin University. In 1952, Cunningham graduated from Sumner High School in St. Louis, Missouri, as a Danforth Award winner. Cunningham earned his A.A. degree in 1954 from Stowe Teachers College, while serving in the United States Naval Air Reserve. Joining the United States Air Force in 1954, Cunningham served as a cartographer, interacting with the U-2 until 1960. Cunningham attended the historic 1960 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California, before enrolling at the University of California at Riverside. Cunningham graduated with a B.A. degree in economics and political science in 1962. In 1963, Cunningham, on a public affairs internship from the Coro Foundation, served as administrative aide to California assemblyman, Charles Warren. In 1973, Cunningham received his M.A. degree in urban studies from Occidental College.

In 1964, Cunningham, moved to Lagos, Nigeria where he became the West Africa regional manager for the DuKane Corporation. In 1967, Cunningham joined the Hughes Aircraft Company as manager of community relations; there, he co-managed the Hughes Active Citizenship Program. Cunningham then went on to found Cunningham, Short, Berryman & Associates in 1968, where he provided management consultation to government and small businesses.

In 1973, Cunningham took Mayor Tom Bradley's place on the Los Angeles City Council, representing the Tenth District. As a councilman, Cunningham authored legislation creating the Mayor's Office of Small Business Assistance. Cunningham also pioneered the use of government grants to restore public buildings; created a system

of community senior citizens centers; and served as chairman of the Grants, Housing, and Community Development Committee. Cunningham served as state chairman of the California Delegation to the Democratic National Committee in 1976. In 1986, Cunningham joined Cranston/Prescott Investment Bankers as senior vice president of public finance. Cunningham served as senior vice president of Community Housing Equity Corporation from 1988 to 1991, while forming Dave Cunningham and Associates, a public affairs consultant firm. Cunningham serves on a number of boards and received both the Southern California Fair Housing and Alex Haley Heritage Awards in 1984.

Cunningham passed away on November 16, 2017 at age 82.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 5, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. (1935 - 2017) represented the Tenth District as a Los Angeles City Councilman, as well as serving as state chairman of the California Delegation to the Democratic National Committee in 1976. Later in his career, Cunningham formed Dave Cunningham and Associates, a public affairs consultant firm.

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:

Cunningham, David S., 1935-2017

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Cunningham, David S., 1935-2017--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews

African American political consultants--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Los Angeles. City Council.

Occupations:

City Council Member

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 David S. Cunningham, Jr., October 5, 2005. 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 David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. was born on June 24, 1935 in Chicago, Illinois to Eula Lawson Cunningham and David Cunningham, Sr. His mother was born in Greeneville, Texas to William Lawson and Nancy Donaldson Lawson. She grew up in Dallas and attended Jarvis Christian College, but did not graduate. She moved to Chicago in her twenties and lived with her sister, who owned a beauty salon across from Sadie Bruce Glover's dance studio. Cunningham's father was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi and grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. He moved to Chicago with his two brothers to work in the stock yards and later, Liberty Life Insurance Company. Cunningham's parents were married in 1931, and his father joined the ministry soon after. The family moved to Freeport, Illinois where his father pastored St. James C.M.E. Church from 1939. Cunningham remembers traveling to Dallas, Texas with his mother and having to move to the back of the bus at the Mason-Dixon Line.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

African American political consultants--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. entered East Side School in Freeport, Illinois at the age of five after proving he could read. His family lived in Decatur, Illinois for about three years, and Cunningham remembers its integrated society and his teachers at E.A. Gastman Elementary School. His family then moved to St. Louis, where Cunningham encountered segregation and struggled socially in school. He excelled academically, however, and entered Charles H. Sumner High School at the age of twelve. During his high school years, Cunningham worked at a shoe shine stand and cleaners at Union Station, then at Fred Harvey's restaurant, where he met Lefty Joe Page and Joe DiMaggio. He often attended baseball games with his father, and he saw Enos Slaughter deliberately run into Jackie Robinson. After the play, Cunningham, HistoryMaker Dick Gregory and others often poured drinks on Slaughter from their seats in left field. Cunningham also remembers listening to Joe Louis' boxing matches and shining Louis' shoes.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. received his A.A. degree from Stowe Teachers College in 1952 where he met his first wife and was an Honorable

Mention All-American in basketball. He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1953 and was assigned as a cartographer at March Air Force Base in Riverside, California. Cunningham remembers mapping with photos taken from a mission in China as a member of the 15th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron. He rose to staff sergeant after his father wrote to Senator Albert Gore, Sr. about Cunningham being passed over for promotions. After his discharge in 1960, Cunningham completed his bachelor's degree at the University of California, Riverside where he played in a jazz band. He was active in politics and met Senator John Tunney. In 1962, he moved to Los Angeles for a Coro Foundation public affairs internship. He worked for Representative Charles Warren and met Jess Unruh and Mayor Tom Bradley. Cunningham was then hired by Dukane Corporation to set up language labs in West Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. worked for Dukane Corporation in several West African countries, including Liberia, Ghana and Nigeria. He met Phillips Petroleum executive Donald Simmons in Lagos and befriended HistoryMaker Horace G. Lawson, Jr. Cunningham remembers attending an event with Lawson where they heard rumors of the 1966 coup in Nigeria right before it occurred. After returning to the United States in 1967, Lawrence A. Hyland recruited Cunningham to serve as community affairs manager for Hughes Aircraft Company, and Cunningham helped to develop Hughes Active Citizenship Campaign to encourage employees' political participation. After a successful run for mayor in 1973, Tom Bradley endorsed Cunningham to fill his seat on the Los Angeles City Council. Cunningham was elected and served on the seat for the Tenth Council District. Cunningham remembers his daughter's birth in Lagos, and describes how he addressed issues that impacted his constituents.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_005, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. met with Police Chief Edward M. Davis shortly after being elected to the Los Angeles City Council. Cunningham recalls how they managed to work together despite initial tension. Cunningham often interacted with Mayor Tom Bradley. He remembers Bradley's personality and recounts a challenging incident where Bradley insisted that Cunningham and fellow council members Robert Farrell and Gilbert Lindsay renegotiate a deal with the firefighters and police unions. Cunningham met several dignitaries while on city council, including Cardinal Karol Wojtyla shortly before he was elected Pope John Paul II. After an unsuccessful run for U.S. Congress, Cunningham left the city council in 1986 to work in investment banking. Soon after, he opened a consulting firm, David Cunningham and Associates. Cunningham talks about his six children. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr., Section A2005_231_001_006, TRT: 0:08:30 ?

The Honorable David S. Cunningham, Jr. narrates his photographs.