

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Sylvester Rhem

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Rhem, Sylvester, 1929-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sylvester Rhem,
Dates:	August 18, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:24:14).
Abstract:	State representative The Honorable Sylvester Rhem (1929 - 2007) was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served from 1981 to 1985. Rhem also worked for the Department of Human Services for the City of Chicago and A.J. Rhem and Associates, a technology services consulting firm. Rhem was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 18, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_059
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Sylvester O. Rhem was born on November 19, 1929, in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from Englewood High School in 1948, Rhem embarked upon a career as a mail carrier with the United States Post Office. In 1956, Rhem joined the Chicago Police Department, working in the Vice, Burglary and Task Force Units. He remained with the police department until 1965, when he accepted a position with the Urban Progress Center, a social service organization. During this time, Rhem earned a degree in public administration from DePaul University.

In 1976, Rhem joined the staff of the Department of Human Services for the City of Chicago. He remained with the department until 1984. While there, he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served from 1981 to 1985. While in the state legislature, Rhem worked with commissions that dealt with the issues of rape, veteran's affairs and insurance, serving as Vice-Chairman for the latter.

He retired from public service in 1985, and is currently a management consultant with A.J. Rhem and Associates, a technology services consulting firm. He has continued to be active in many organizations, including the Greater North Michigan Avenue Businessmen's Association, the Chicago Patrolmen's Association, the Greater Boy Scouts of America and the Knights of Peter Claver. He and his wife are the parents of one son. In addition, they have four grandchildren and four great-grand children.

Rhem passed away on June 17, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Sylvester Rhem was conducted by Adele Hodge on August 18,

2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. State representative The Honorable Sylvester Rhem (1929 - 2007) was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he served from 1981 to 1985. Rhem also worked for the Department of Human Services for the City of Chicago and A.J. Rhem and Associates, a technology services consulting 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:

Rhem, Sylvester, 1929-2007

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Haynes, Frank (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Rhem, Sylvester, 1929-2007--Interviews

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews

State governments--Officials and employees--Interviews

Business consultants--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Illinois

Occupations:

State Representative

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 Sylvester Rhem, August 18, 2000.
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 Sylvester Rhem, Section A2000_059_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:14 ?

Sylvester Rhem was born in Chicago, Illinois on November 19, 1929 to Martha Wilson and Sylvester O'Neal, both of Little Rock, Arkansas. Martha Wilson later married Edward Rhem who was from Youngstown, Ohio. Rhem was raised in the Woodlawn neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. He attended McCosh Grammar School and Englewood High School where he met his future wife, Rose. He credits his elementary and high school teachers for influencing his career. After graduation, Rhem began to pursue a degree in electrical engineering at Wilson Junior College in Chicago, Illinois, but was discouraged by a professor who told him he would not be successful in engineering as an African American man. Rhem earned a living as a postal worker and as a Chicago police officer from 1956 to 1965. He was then appointed to replace then-Illinois State Senator, Harold Washington. Rhem also describes his early experiences in the Illinois General Assembly in 1981.

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews.

State governments--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Business consultants--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sylvester Rhem, Section A2000_059_001_002, TRT: 0:24:45 ?

While Sylvester Rhem was employed as a postal carrier, there was an increased demand for African American police officers in Chicago, Illinois. Several of his co-workers at the post office decided to enroll in the police academy, which motivated Rhem to do the same. He worked as a police officer from 1956 to 1965, and describes his and others' experiences as police officers in Chicago. As a police officer, Rhem worked in various units including credit fraud, task force, vice control and burglary. Although African Americans were increasingly joining police officer ranks, they were rarely promoted. Rhem joined a policemen's association, the Black Guardians, to help address these issues. He also describes his experiences serving as an Illinois State Representative from 1981 to 1985, as well as the bill he introduced to build a casino in Chicago which failed to pass in the Illinois Senate after success in the Illinois House of Representatives.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sylvester Rhem, Section A2000_059_001_003, TRT: 0:30:15 ?