

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable William Clay, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Clay, William L.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr.,
Dates:	January 22, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:59:27).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable William Clay, Sr. (1931 -) served sixteen terms in Congress as a representative for the State of Missouri. Clay was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 22, 2003, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_015
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Congressman William Lacy Clay, Sr., was born on April 30, 1931, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Luella Hyatt and Irving Clay. Growing up with six siblings in a St. Louis tenement, Clay excelled in school; however, at age thirteen, he went to work, taking a job as a janitor in a clothing store where he would later become the tailor. Clay eventually graduated from St. Louis University in 1953 with his B.S. degree in political science; he served in the United States Army until 1955. Between 1955 and 1959, Clay worked as a real estate broker in St. Louis, and from 1959 to 1961 as a manager of Industrial Life Insurance Company. Clay then became active in the Civil Rights Movement; during his activities as a Civil Rights activist, he served a total of 105 days in jail for taking part in a demonstration in 1963.

Clay became active in local politics, and was eventually elected to the St. Louis Board of Aldermen in 1959; he continued to serve as an alderman for the 26th Ward until 1964, at which time he resigned to become a union official and ward politician. In 1968, Clay was elected to Congress, becoming the first African American elected from Missouri and one of only two African American representatives who had been elected from states west of the Mississippi River at that time. Clay served sixteen terms in Congress, gaining a reputation for his streetwise urban politics and strong ties to organized labor.

One of the founders of the Congressional Black Caucus, Clay wrote a comprehensive treatise on the history of African American members of Congress titled: *Just Permanent Interests: Black Americans in Congress, 1870-1991*. Clay married his wife, Carol Ann Johnson, in 1953 in St. Louis; the couple had three children, Vicki Flynn, William Jr., and Michelle Katherine. Clay's son William went on to his father's former congressional seat.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 22, 2003, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable William Clay, Sr. (1931 -) served sixteen terms in Congress as a representative for the State of Missouri.

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:

Clay, William L.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Clay, William L.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Missouri

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 William Clay, Sr., January 22, 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 William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_001, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

William L. Clay shares stories of his childhood, from being carried by three siblings who had to share a single pair of shoes to the rampant segregation of Depression era St. Louis. Educated in Catholic schools with his tuition paid by a white philanthropist, Clay says his education was less than subpar due to racism and segregation. A mischevious youth, he recalls his first run-in with the police who accused him of being involved in a murder. This incedent eventually propelled him into politics. He also talks about the pride he took in his first job

and being drafted into the Army after graduating from college.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:35 ?

William L. Clay picks up his life story from his collegiate years at St. Louis University to the beginning of his political career. Clay's future strength as a coalition builder and vanguard began during his Army years where he was suddenly confronted by Jim Crow laws of the south. Frustrated with the sub-human treatment, he led boycotts and personally integrated the Army pool. His tenure in the NAACP Youth Council honed his political skills, but he and his compatriots were too progressive for the national office which revoked their local charter. Those aligned with Clay splintered off into CORE, and those supporters helped propel him into an aldermanic seat in the St. Louis City Council.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_003,
TRT: 0:30:35 ?

William L. Clay decides to run for U.S. Representative from Missouri after a long stint as St. Louis City Alderman. He reveals that after a reapportionment, the Democratic Party fought the creation of this all-black district all the way to court. It was only with the help of the Republican Party that the district came into existence. Clay gives extensive accounts of the high level of discrimination blacks faced in the workplace, particularly skilled and union laborers. He discusses the legislative measures he took to reverse these discriminatory practices during his tenure as alderman. He also details how his rise to power was forged with strong union ties and unexpected alliances across racial lines.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_004,
TRT: 0:30:54 ?

William L. Clay reveals just how the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) came into existence. With the seating of nine black Representatives at one time, the House and the White House suddenly had to face this unified group of lawmakers on their terms. The CBC used their successful skills of coalition building and agitation to bow the will of the majority to begin to implement some of their ideas. Clay also discusses how, as the CBC Historian, he decided to write his book, "Permanent Interests." He also reveals how he and fellow CBC members played a hand in helping Randall Robinson create TransAfrica.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_005,
TRT: 0:30:25 ?

This segment encompasses Clay's descriptions of his years in Congress as a major legislator and his ups and downs with the White House. He is most proud of his 22 year effort to pass the Hatch Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act. He dispels some common myths that John Kennedy and Jimmy Carter were favorable towards black interests and civil rights. In particular, he details how he believes Jimmy Carter worked to thwart the Martin Luther King Holiday bill. Clay is most profoundly disturbed by the hagiographic treatment of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, both of whom Clay felt nearly destroyed the United States with their criminal activities in the White House. Clay reveals that Nixon placed him on an "enemies list" and used various means to destroy his political career.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Clay, Sr., Section A2003_015_001_006,
TRT: 0:28:39 ?

William L. Clay wraps up his interview with a retelling of the infamous Jefferson Bank boycott which caused him to be jailed for nearly six months for

contempt of court. He continues with his assessment of the true motives of white politicians -- to gain black support and discard it after elections to maintain their base of support. He goes on to define what he thinks makes a great politician and contemplates the future of black America. The segment closes with almost 19 photos of William L. Clay during his political career.