

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lonnie Bunch

PERSON

Bunch, Lonnie G.

Alternative Names: Lonnie Bunch; Lonnie Griffith Bunch III

Life Dates: November 18, 1952-

Place of Birth: Newark, New Jersey, USA

Work: Washington, District of Columbia

Occupations: Museum Director

Biographical Note

Museum director and historian Lonnie G. Bunch was born November 18, 1952 in Newark, New Jersey to Montrose Boone Bunch and Lonnie Bunch, Sr. After graduating from Belleville High School in 1970, Bunch enrolled in Howard University and later transferred to American University in Washington, D.C, where he earned his B.A. degree in 1974, his M.A. degree in 1976, and his Ph.D. in 1978 in American and African American history.

While working on his doctorate, Bunch served as an adjunct lecturer at American University. After receiving his Ph.D., he was hired as an education specialist at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. He then took a position with the University of Massachusetts, Amherst as an assistant professor of American and African American history from 1979 until 1981, when he taught history at the Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn. In 1983, Bunch was appointed the founding curator of the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, where he remained until 1989. From there, Bunch went on to serve as an adjunct professor of museum studies at George Washington University and as the associate director for curatorial affairs at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, a position he retained until 2000. In 2001, Bunch was named the president of the Chicago Historical Society. In 2005, Bunch was appointed as the founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., which opened in 2016. In 2019, Bunch was named the fourteenth Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

Bunch has published numerous books and magazine articles on topics ranging from African American history to cultural experiences in Japan. In 2019, he published his memoir *A Fool's Errand: Creating the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the Age of Bush, Obama, and Trump*.

Bunch has served as a trustee of the American Association of Museums and the Council of the American Association of State & Local History and as a member of the American Antiquarian Society. Bunch was appointed to the Commission for the Preservation of the White House by President George W. Bush in 2002 and reappointed by President Barack Obama in 2010.

Bunch was named one of the 100 most influential museum professionals of the twentieth century by the American Association of Museums in 2005. In 2019, Bunch received the Freedom Medal from the Roosevelt Institute, the W.E.B. Du Bois Medal from the Hutchins Center at Harvard University, and the National Equal Justice Award from the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. In 2021, Bunch received the Tony Horwitz Prize from the Society of American Historians and France's highest award, The Legion of Honor.

Bunch and his wife, Maria Marable-Bunch, live in Washington, D.C. They have two daughters.

Lonnie G. Bunch was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 5, 2003, June 9, 2022, and November 30, 2022.

Related Entries

Belleville High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

HS diploma

Howard University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

American University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

American University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.A.

American University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

National Museum of African American History and Culture [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2005 to 2019]

Founding Director

Smithsonian Insitution [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2019 to ?]

Secretary

Smithsonian Institution [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 197801 to 197909]

Educator & Historian

Chicago Historical Society [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 200101 to 2005]

President

California Afro-American Museum [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 198306 to 198906]

Curator

National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 198906 to 200101]

Curator & Associate Director

University of Massachusetts, Amherst [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 197909 to 198306]

Professor

American Association of Museums [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

Smithsonian Institution [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Council of Advisors

Academy of Juvenile Justice [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

Organization of American Historians [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board Member

American Historical Society [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (Boule) [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Member

American Association of State and Local History [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Council

Lincoln Library and Museum [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

National Museum of American Industry [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board of Trustees

American Antiquarian Society [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Commission for the Preservation of the White House [MEMBEROF]
[from 2002 to 2016]

Member