

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Danny K. Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Danny K., 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis,
Dates:	December 15, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:18:20).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable Danny K. Davis (1941 -) is one of three African American congressmen representing Chicago in the Illinois congress. Davis represents the 7th District of Illinois. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_298
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

United States Congressman from the 7th District of Illinois, Danny K. Davis was born a sharecropper's son on September 6, 1941, in Parkdale, Arkansas. He attended Savage High School in Parkdale, where he graduated in 1957. A history major with an education minor, Davis earned a B.A. from Arkansas A. M. & N. College at Pine Bluff, Arkansas in 1961. Moving to Chicago, he clerked for the United States Post Office before going to work as a teacher at Ferdinand Magellan School in 1962. Davis received an M.S. in school guidance from Chicago State University in 1968 while continuing his education in 1969 and 1970 with courses in administration, supervision, psychology, and political science. In 1977, he was awarded the Ph.D. in public administration by Union Institute.

During the 1960s, Davis, like many others, became involved in the modern day Civil Rights Movement. He also became active in politics on Chicago's West Side. In 1969, he became executive director of the Greater Lawndale Conservation Commission, and then left to become director of training for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center. By 1971, Davis was a manpower consultant for the Westside Health Planning Organization (WHPO), and in 1972, became executive director of WHPO. From 1976 through 1981, he served as special assistant to the president of Mile Square Community Health Center. Davis also taught college courses at Malcolm X College, National College of Education, Illinois Benedictine College, Roosevelt University and the University of Illinois School of Public Health.

In 1979, Davis won the aldermanic seat for Chicago's 29th Ward as an independent. He then became 29th Ward Committeeman in 1984. Active during Chicago's Harold Washington years, Davis served until 1990 when he resigned from the Chicago City Council to take a seat on the Cook County Board of Commissioners. After an unsuccessful bid for mayor in 1991, he ran for and won the U.S. 7th Congressional District seat in 1996. Davis is now one of three African Americans representing Chicago in the United States Congress. Considered a grassroots progressive like former mayor Harold Washington, Davis is fond of quoting nineteenth century abolitionist

Frederick Douglass on the nature of struggle. Davis, a popular public speaker as well as an effective legislator, connects with constituents on education, criminal justice and housing issues.

Davis has two children and lives with his wife, Vera, on Chicago's West Side.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. U.S. congressman The Honorable Danny K. Davis (1941 -) is one of three African American congressmen representing Chicago in the Illinois congress. Davis represents the 7th District of Illinois.

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:

Davis, Danny K., 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Danny K., 1941- --Interviews

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews

African American politicians--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American families--Southern States

African Americans--Genealogy

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--African Americans

Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)

Ku Klux Klan (1915-)

Country life--United States--Anecdotes

Parkdale (Ark.)--Social conditions

Farmers--Arkansas--Parkdale

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Education--Arkansas--Parkdale

Sharecroppers--Arkansas

Race relations--Arkansas

City council members--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Chicago (Ill.)--Social conditions

Byrne, Jane, 1933-

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987

Palmer, Lu

Elections--United States--Illinois

United States. Congress. House

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Illinois

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 Danny K. Davis, December 15, 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 Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Congressman Danny K. Davis recalls family history from Alabama and Arkansas, and tells about finding distant relatives in recent years. He tells stories passed down from his father and his own memories about searching for Confederate "treasuries" hidden from the Yankees during the Civil War, and about seeing ghosts or "haints" of recently departed neighbors. He also relates his father's stories and his own reading about tricks used by the Klan to scare superstitious African Americans and about how black people were cheated out of property after Reconstruction.

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews.

African American politicians--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American families--Southern States.

African Americans--Genealogy.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--African Americans.

Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877).

Ku Klux Klan (1915-).

Country life--United States--Anecdotes.

Parkdale (Ark.)--Social conditions.

Farmers--Arkansas--Parkdale.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

Education--Arkansas--Parkdale.

Sharecroppers--Arkansas.

Race relations--Arkansas.

City council members--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Chicago (Ill.)--Social conditions.

Byrne, Jane, 1933-.

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Palmer, Lu.

Elections--United States--Illinois.

United States. Congress. House.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Congressman Danny Davis talks in detail about his parents, Hezekiah 'H.D.' Davis and Mazzie Lee Glass Davis, relating entertaining anecdotes to illustrate their generosity, values, humor and wisdom despite their lack of formal education. He describes the small town of Parkdale, Arkansas, where an area called "the quarters" housed African Americans who worked in white folks' houses or at the mill; the Davis family, tenant farmers, lived in rural Ashley County. He tells how the farming cycles controlled their cash flow and their school term. Davis also remembers church and his father's public prayers, his love of reading in his youth, his difficulty with stuttering as a child, and a very influential teacher, Mrs. Beadie King.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Congressman Danny Davis talks about his experiences at his small high school in Parkdale, Arkansas and at Arkansas A. M. & N. College (later University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff) during the 1950s. He also recounts a story about his sharecropper father, who successfully stood up for his rights when the plantation owner's son tried to cheat him out of what the Davis family was owed for the

year's cotton crop.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Congressman Danny Davis talks about his experiences as a student in the 1950s at Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical, and Normal College, later University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. He recalls students' involvement in the early civil rights movement and shares memories of race relations in Arkansas during his youth. Davis tells of his move after college to Chicago, Illinois, where he first worked for several years as a public school teacher and counselor, then for community health centers on Chicago's West Side. Becoming increasingly involved in community activism, he eventually ran for office and in 1979 was elected to the Chicago City Council. Davis recalls his first years as an alderman during Jane Byrne's mayoral administration.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_005, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Congressman Danny Davis talks about his election to the Chicago City Council in 1979, the first independent, non-Machine candidate to be elected from the West Side, where black aldermen had been controlled by white ward bosses. He recalls the meeting in Lu Palmer's basement where Harold Washington was asked to run for mayor of Chicago and describes events of the campaign and Washington's first term, in which an ongoing conflict with white aldermen became known as "Council Wars." .

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_006, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Danny Davis praises Chicago Mayor Harold Washington for his ability to share his vision for Chicago, spreading a sense of hope throughout the community. Davis, who was at that time a Chicago alderman, recalls his last meeting with Washington at which they talked about his plans to focus on Chicago's poor in his new term. Davis describes Washington's sudden death from a heart attack as a severe blow to his multi-racial, progressive coalition and discusses the shock, confusion and fragmentation among Washington's supporters after his death. He also discusses his own failed mayoral campaign in 1991, his 1997 election to the U.S. House of Representatives, and some of the legislation he has passed in Congress.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Section A2003_298_001_007, TRT: 0:20:10 ?

Congressman Danny K. Davis talks about his work as a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1997-2003.