

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Stroger, John H., Jr., 1929-2008
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr.,
Dates:	January 27, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:23).
Abstract:	County commissioner The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. (1929 - 2008) was the first elected African American president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the Cook County Board and Forest Preserve District. He has served on the Chicago Metropolitan Healthcare Council, and was president of the National Association of Counties. Stroger was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 27, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_006
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

John H. Stroger, Jr., the first African American president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, was born May 19, 1929, to Ella and John Stroger, Sr. in Helena, Arkansas. Stroger attended an all black elementary school and Eliza Miller High School, earning his diploma in 1949. Stroger attended Xavier University in New Orleans, a historically black Catholic university, where his classmates included Norman Francis, Dutch Morial, and Richard Gumbel. Graduating in 1953 with his B.S. degree in business administration, Stroger taught school, coached basketball, and worked closely with the NAACP.

At his mother's urging, Stroger moved to Chicago in 1953 where he became involved in Chicago's South Side Democratic Party. It was there that Stroger met Congressman William L. Dawson, Ralph Metcalfe, and Harold Washington. Stroger was appointed as an assistant auditor with the Municipal Court of Chicago in 1954, and served as personnel director for the Cook County Jail from 1955 to 1961. Stroger then worked for the financial director of the State of Illinois while earning a law degree from DePaul University Law School in 1965. In 1968, Stroger was elected 8th Ward Committeeman. After his election to the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1970, Stroger went on to chair every major committee including finance, health, building and zoning. As Commissioner, Stroger sponsored legislation aimed at assisting minority and female owned businesses. He also cosponsored the county's human rights, ethics, and assault weapons ban ordinances. In 1994, Stroger became the first African American to be elected president of the Cook County Board and Forest Preserve District. As board president, Stroger balanced the county's \$2.9 billion dollar budget, instituted a juvenile drug court, appointed a commission on women's issues, and opened a new AIDS treatment and research facility. Dedicated to health care, Stroger served on the Chicago Metropolitan Healthcare Council and the board of South Shore Hospital. Stroger's efforts to win approval for a new Cook County Hospital resulted in the facility being named the John H. Stroger,

Jr. Cook County Hospital. Stroger was president of the National Association of Counties and was appointed by former President Bill Clinton as a member of the Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations. In 2006, Stroger suffered a severe stroke and had to resign as president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners despite being re-elected earlier in the year.

A long time member of St. Felicitas Catholic Church, Stroger and his wife, Yonnie, have a son, Todd, and a daughter, Yonnie Lynn. Another of Stroger's sons, Hans Eric, passed away while in college. Stroger's surviving son, Todd, is the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners.

Stroger passed away on January 18, 2008 at the age of 78.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 27, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. County commissioner The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. (1929 - 2008) was the first elected African American president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the Cook County Board and Forest Preserve District. He has served on the Chicago Metropolitan Healthcare Council, and was president of the National Association of Counties.

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:

Stroger, John H., Jr., 1929-2008

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Stroger, John H., Jr., 1929-2008 --Interviews

Civil servants--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Cook County (Ill.). Board of County Commissioners

Occupations:

County Commissioner

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 John H. Stroger, Jr., January 27, 2004. 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 John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. was born on May 19, 1929 in Helena, Arkansas. His mother, Ella Jones Stroger, was born in 1900 in Marvell, Arkansas. Her family was originally from Moscow, Tennessee and moved to Arkansas after Emancipation, where they farmed cotton. His mother wanted to be a schoolteacher, but was a domestic worker. She recited poetry to her children and insisted on their education. His father, John H. Stroger, Sr., was born in 1885 on a plantation in Phillips County, Arkansas. He ran away when he was nine years old and went to work in a bucket factory. He eventually learned to alter, clean, and press clothes. His family left Georgia, following the path General William T. Sherman's troops during the Civil War; and, eventually migrated to Arkansas. In Helena, African Americans provided labor and whites controlled the farms and all related industries. Stroger's family attended New Light Missionary Baptist Church in Helena. He remembers the town's cleanliness and black professionals.

Civil servants--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

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

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr.'s father told him stories about the 1919 Elaine race riot in Helena, Arkansas. Stroger attended Eliza Miller High School in West Helena, Arkansas, which encompassed both elementary school and high school. The school was donated to the community Eliza Miller, an African American landowner, whose descendants also attended the school. Stroger played sports and remembers his teachers at the school. He converted to Catholicism due to the influence of a priest who was a youth organizer, and decided to attend Xavier University, a Catholic school, on a school trip to New Orleans, Louisiana. Stroger enrolled in 1948 along with future Xavier president HistoryMaker Norman Francis. At Xavier, joined the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and played basketball, which he coached in Indiana during the summers. After graduating with his B.A. degree in business administration, he taught and coached basketball in Hughes, Arkansas before being sent to live in Chicago, Illinois by his mother in 1953.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. was first exposed to politics in his hometown of Helena, Arkansas. In 1953, he moved to Chicago, Illinois' Bronzeville

neighborhood where he met African American politician Ralph Metcalfe and joined Metcalfe's political organization through which he met HistoryMaker The Honorable Justice Charles Freeman and Harold Washington. When he first arrived in Chicago, Stroger worked for a mail order company then as an assistant auditor for the municipal court of Chicago. In 1955, through Metcalfe's patronage, he became assistant to the warden of Cook County Jail. In 1961, Stroger began working as an investigator for the Department of Investigation and worked for the Illinois Department of Financial Institution until 1967. In 1965, Stroger earned his law degree from DePaul University College of Law in Chicago. In 1967, Mayor Richard J. Daley appointed him 8th Ward Committeeman and he was elected to the position in 1968. Stroger describes the 8th ward and how he met his wife.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_004, TRT: 0:29:02 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. worked for Ralph Metcalfe's political organization, along with Harold Washington, to elect Metcalfe as the Chicago, Illinois' Third Ward Committeeman and Richard J. Daley as mayor of Chicago in 1955. Stroger remembers how the 1968 riots, following Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination affected, the city's West Side. In 1970, Stroger was elected to the Cook County Board of Commissioners where he advocated for healthcare reform, the rebuilding of the decrepit county hospital and single-member county electoral districts. He was elected president of the Cook County Board in 1994 and served on the Cook County Board until his death in 2008. Stroger talks about Metcalfe's advocacy for police reform in the 1970s and describes his relationships with former Cook County Board president George Dunne and former Chicago mayors Harold Washington, Michael Bilandic and Jane Byrne. Stroger has been involved in the Rainbow PUSH Coalition since it was Operation Breadbasket.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_005, TRT: 0:24:05 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. supported Richard M. Daley during the 1983 Democratic primary elections for Chicago mayor, but was an active supporter of Harold Washington in the general election. In 1994, Stroger was elected president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Under Stroger's leadership, the county had its highest bond rating in twenty-five years in 2004, but he is concerned about that the economic downturn will place a greater burden on the county's medical and criminal justice system. He was president of the National Association of Counties in the early 1990s. Stroger talks about Dan Ryan, Jr. and Ryan, Sr., former presidents of the Cook County Board; his family, including his son HistoryMaker The Honorable Todd Stroger; his hometowns; and his alma mater, Xavier University. Stroger describes his concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered, and reflects upon his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_001_006, TRT: 0:16:36 ?

The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr. narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section
A2004_006_JOHN_STROGER_JR_06_MED_003, TRT: 1:30:00 ?

This tape contains footage of a meeting of the Cook County Law Enforcement and Corrections Committee, chaired by John H. Stroger, Jr. The footage was shot by SCTN Teleproductions.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section

A2004_006_JOHN_STROGER_JR_06_MED_004, TRT: 0:05:16 ?

This tape footage from the event A Salute to John H. Stroger, Jr. This program features notable Chicago political and civic leaders giving their praise for John H. Stroger, Jr. Featured on this tape are John Rogers, Roland Burris, Beatrice Sumlin, Toni Preckwinkle, Paul Ray, Maria Pappas, Valerie Jarrett, Tom Hynes, and Billy Ocasio. This program was produced by SCTN Teleproductions.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable John H. Stroger, Jr., Section

A2004_006_JOHN_STROGER_JR_06_MED_005, TRT: 0:04:11 ?

This tape footage from the event A Salute to John H. Stroger, Jr. This program features notable Chicago political and civic leaders giving their praise for John H. Stroger, Jr. Featured on this tape are John Rogers, Roland Burris, Beatrice Sumlin, Toni Preckwinkle, Paul Ray, Maria Pappas, Valerie Jarrett, Tom Hynes, and Billy Ocasio. This program was produced by SCTN Teleproductions.