

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wayne Curry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Curry, Wayne, 1951-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry,
Dates:	September 29, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:22).
Abstract:	Corporate lawyer and county government official Wayne Curry (1951 - 2014) served as the first African American County Executive of Prince George's County. In addition to holding public office, Curry also has a successful law practice. Curry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 29, 2004, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_185
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Wayne Keith Curry was born on January 6, 1951, in Brooklyn, New York; his father was a teacher and his mother was a homemaker and later a secretary. Curry grew up in Cheverly, Maryland, a bedroom community outside of Washington, D.C., where his family helped to integrate the neighborhood in the 1950s. He and his older brother also integrated the schools, being the first blacks to attend Cheverly-Tuxedo Elementary in 1959; he earned his high school diploma from Bladensburg High School in 1968.

In 1972, Curry earned his B.A. degree in psychology from Western Maryland College, where he was president of the freshman class. Following graduation, he worked as a teacher and director of the Child Daycare Center of Prince George's County. In 1974, Curry took a hiatus from the professional arena and traveled across America; during his trip he earned money working at truck stops and slept at campsites throughout the country.

From 1975 until 1980, Curry worked in the Winfield Kelly administration. Kelly was the executive for Prince George's County from 1974 until 1978. Curry's career began as a staffer responsible for writing constituent reply mail; he later went on to serve as community affairs assistant, administrative assistant to the county's chief administrative officer and senior assistant to the executive. While working for Kelly, Curry also attended law school at night, earning his law degree from the University of Maryland in 1980. From 1980 until 1983, he worked as a real estate and development lawyer for the Michael Companies. In 1984, Curry started his own law practice and became a well-known, successful corporate attorney.

In 1994, Curry returned to the county executive's office and made history when he became the first African American to serve in that office. Curry served two terms as Prince George's County Executive. Curry continued to practice law in the county throughout this time, and long after.

Curry passed way on July 2, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wayne Curry was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on September 29, 2004, in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate lawyer and county government official Wayne Curry (1951 - 2014) served as the first African American County Executive of Prince George's County. In addition to holding public office, Curry also has a successful law practice.

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:

Curry, Wayne, 1951-2014

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Curry, Wayne, 1951-2014--Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

Civil servants--Maryland--Prince George's County--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Maryland--Prince George's County--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Prince George's County (Md.)

Occupations:

County Government Official

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 Wayne Curry, September 29, 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 Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_001, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Wayne Curry was born on January 6th, 1951 in Brooklyn, New York, New York. His mother, Juliette Harris Curry, grew up in Georgia and South Carolina, and his father, Eugene Curry, grew up in rural Maryland and served in the U.S. Army. Curry's parents met at Hampton Institute in Virginia, where Eugene Curry was a star football player. His maternal grandmother, Vivian Harris, worked as a clerk in government agencies in Washington, D.C., Curry frequently visited his paternal grandparents in the Baltimore, Maryland area. Curry's family moved to Cheverly, Maryland while he was in elementary school. He grew up in Cheverly with four siblings and they had free rein to explore the woods near their home. They lived in the town's fourth ward, the only place in where blacks were allowed to settle. As a child, Curry played many pickup sports games and swam in a creek that the town later learned was polluted. During junior high school, he had a job in a pet store, where he was in charge of cleaning the cages.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

Civil servants--Maryland--Prince George's County--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Maryland--Prince George's County--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Wayne Curry originally attended Fairmount Heights Elementary School in Fairmount Heights, Maryland, but in the fourth grade, his parents enrolled him and his brother, Daryl Curry, in Cheverly-Tuxedo Elementary School in Cheverly, Maryland. They, along with one other black student, integrated the previously all-white school. Curry and his brother were often unfairly blamed by teachers and classmates for trouble in the classroom, and Daryl once punched a boy who attacked them after school. Curry spent time in the woods near his house and developed an artistic side, taking up sculpture and the violin. As he got older, his neighborhood friends criticized him for developing different mannerisms in his speech and habits. Curry entered Bladensburg Junior High School in Bladensburg, Maryland, which was majority white but had more socioeconomic diversity. He began to follow the Civil Rights Movement and especially admired the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as Billy Graham, whom he saw at a tent revival.

Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Wayne Curry attended Bladensburg High School in Bladensburg, Maryland where he was on a college prep track, managed the basketball team and enjoyed listening to a variety of music. With his family, he attended the Church of the Atonement in Washington, D.C. After graduating in 1968, Curry entered Western Maryland College in Westminster, Maryland on a scholarship. He was president of his freshmen class, but he disliked the provincial and prejudiced community at his college. During Curry's time at Western Maryland, his car was destroyed, fraternities cheered the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and he saw the Ku Klux Klan recruit on campus. He became interested in psychology after taking a class with Professor Stephen Colyer. Curry graduated college in 1972, then took a job at the Child Daycare Center of Prince George's County Inc., part of the Model Cities Program, which he quit in 1973 in protest over government interference. He spent most of 1974 on a road trip through the United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_004, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Wayne Curry briefly volunteered on political campaigns for Spiro Agnew and

Joseph Tydings during his youth. After traveling the U.S. on a road trip, Curry returned to Maryland in 1975. He was hired by Winfield M. Kelly, Jr., the county executive of Prince George's County, Maryland, to write replies to constituent letters. While working for Kelly, he enrolled in the University Of Maryland School Of Law in Baltimore. After Kelly lost his bid for re-election, Curry needed a new job to continue law school. He joined the real estate business as general counsel for NAI Michael, where he worked with Kenneth H. Michael, who became an ally despite outward differences from Curry. In 1983, he joined Russell Shipley's law firm as a partner, and had clients such as Dimensions Healthcare and the family of Len Bias. Through working on the campaigns of HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson in 1984 and Alexander Williams, Jr., Curry took an interest in politics and ran for county executive of Prince George's County in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Wayne Curry was elected as the first African American county executive of Prince George's County, Maryland in 1994, despite being endorsed by only a fraction of elected officials in the local Democratic Party. He learned that Prince George's County was \$140 million in debt, contrary to the statements of his predecessor who became Maryland's governor, Parris N. Glendening. Curry settled legal battles over bussing in public schools, passed a state audit of his first budget and proposed the Tax Reform Initiative by Marylanders. He successfully negotiated with Jack Kent Cooke, owner of the Washington Redskins, to build a new stadium in Prince George's County without using any of the county's money; Curry also spearheaded the construction of Prince George's County Sports and Learning Complex, an Olympics training center. Curry reflects on his successes as county executive and talks about his future plans for a career in politics. He describes how he would like to be remembered and his hopes for a legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Wayne Curry, Section A2004_185_001_006, TRT: 0:08:22 ?

Wayne Curry narrates his photographs.