

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Basil Paterson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Paterson, Basil A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Basil Paterson,
Dates:	January 18, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:28:42).
Abstract:	Lawyer, city government appointee, state government appointee, and state senator The Honorable Basil Paterson (1926 - 2014) was appointed Secretary of State for New York, and was a New York State senator. Paterson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 18, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_016
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer Basil Alexander Paterson was born on April 27, 1926, in Harlem, New York. Paterson's mother Evangeline Rondon was a secretary for Marcus Garvey. Paterson received his high school diploma in 1942 from De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City. After working for six months, Paterson entered St. John's College from which he received his B.S. degree in biology in 1948, having spent two years in the Army. Paterson entered St. John's Law School and received his J.D. degree in 1951. Paterson then began his professional career as a lawyer in Harlem where he became law partners with Ivan A. Michael and former New York City Mayor David Dinkins. Paterson and Dinkins became heavily involved in Democratic politics in Harlem, along with former Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, and Congressman Charles Rangel.

Paterson was elected to the New York State Senate in 1965 where he remained until he won the primary to be the Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor on a slate headed by Arthur Goldberg in 1970. The ticket lost to incumbent Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller. Paterson's son, David Paterson, was elected Lieutenant Governor in 2006; in 2008 he became Governor when Eliot Spitzer resigned. Paterson became the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution in 1972; he remained in that position until 1977. Paterson was the first elected African American Vice Chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1972. In 1978, Mayor Ed Koch appointed Paterson to the position of Deputy Mayor of Labor Relations and Personnel. In 1979, Governor Hugh Carey appointed Paterson to the position of New York Secretary of State, making him the first African American to hold that rank. In 1989, Paterson became a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, a position he held until 1995.

Paterson chaired the New York City Mayor's Judiciary Committee for four years, and the New York State Governor's Screening Panel for the Second Department for eight years. Paterson also served for ten years as a member of the Board of Editors of the New York Law Journal. In 2003, Paterson was appointed to the

Commission to Promote Public Confidence in Judicial Elections. That same year, Paterson was elected Chairman of the KeySpan Foundation Board of Directors. Paterson served as Co-Chairman of the New York State Governor's Commission on Determinate Sentencing, and the New York State Commission on Powers of Local Government. Paterson received numerous awards including the Humanitarian Award from Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and the St. John's University Medal of Excellence. Paterson practiced law at the law firm of Meyer, Suozzi, English and Klein where he served as co-chair of the firm's labor practice.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Basil Paterson was conducted by Shawn Wilson on January 18, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lawyer, city government appointee, state government appointee, and state senator The Honorable Basil Paterson (1926 - 2014) was appointed Secretary of State for New York, and was a New York State senator.

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:

Paterson, Basil A.

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Paterson, Basil A.--Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews

African American government executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

New York (N.Y.)

New York

New York

Occupations:

Lawyer

City Government Appointee

State Government Appointee

State Senator

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 Basil Paterson, January 18, 2007.

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 Basil Paterson, Section A2007_016_001_001, TRT: 0:30:09 ?

The Honorable Basil Paterson was born on April 27, 1926 in New York City to Evangeline Rondon Paterson and Leonard Paterson. His mother emigrated from Jamaica, while his father came to the United States from Carriacou, Grenada. Paterson's mother was Marcus Garvey's secretary, and his father was interested in politics. Paterson grew up in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where he attended St. Thomas the Apostle Church. He recalls playing stickball in the street; his neighbor, boxer Sugar Ray Robinson; as well as police corruption, including discrimination against African American officers. Paterson attended James Fenimore Cooper Junior High School and DeWitt Clinton High School. Although he had never met a black teacher, he aspired to a career in education. At his first job after graduation, Paterson met George Fleary, a student who worked part time while attending The City College of New York. Fleary encouraged him to do the same, and Paterson enrolled to study biology at St. John's College.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

African American government executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Basil Paterson, Section A2007_016_001_002, TRT: 0:29:08 ?

The Honorable Basil Paterson attended St. John's College, where he was one of four African American biology students. He planned to become a doctor, and the many African American doctors in his Harlem neighborhood served as role models. He talks about integration's impact on black professionalism and education. At seventeen years old, Paterson left college to join the U.S. Army, where he was stationed at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and experienced discrimination. After graduating from St. John's College School of Law, Paterson joined Levy and Harten, a law firm in Manhattan. Denied a raise in salary despite his excellent performance, he decided to found his own firm, and was joined by attorney Ivan A. Michael, who became his partner. Paterson

explains the difference between the practice of law and the study of law. Later, as a New York State senator, Paterson defended labor rights, including the right to strike. He talks about the New York City transit strike of 2005, and the value of protest.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Basil Paterson, Section A2007_016_001_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

The Honorable Basil Paterson was the first in his family to attend college, and met Livingston Wingate, his mentor, through Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. Paterson describes New York City's fraternities, which were less socially oriented than most. After law school, he joined the NAACP Legal Redress Committee, and formed the Young Democratic Independent Citizens Club. Later, Paterson moved his law firm to 116th Street and 8th Avenue in Harlem, and David N. Dinkins joined the firm. They became close allies, along with Charles B. Rangel and Percy Sutton, and the group became known as the Harlem Clubhouse. Paterson secured Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.'s support after Powell learned he shared a birthday with Paterson's son. In 1965, Paterson ran successfully for New York State Senate, his first political office. He describes the impact of the New York City transit strike of 2005, and talks about its leader, Roger Toussaint. Paterson also reflects upon the progress made by the African American community during his life.