

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Gibson, Kenneth A. |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, |
| Dates: | January 31, 2017 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2017 |
| Physical Description: | 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:37:06). |
| Abstract: | Political leader Kenneth Gibson (1932 - 2019) was elected as the 34th Mayor of Newark, New Jersey and was the first African American elected mayor of any major Northeastern United States city. He served from 1970 to 1986. Gibson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2017, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2017_042 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Political leader Kenneth Gibson was born on May 15, 1932 in Enterprise, Alabama to Willie Gibson and Daisy Gibson. In 1940, his family migrated to Newark, New Jersey. He attended Monmouth Street School, Cleveland Junior High School and graduated with honors from Newark's Central High School. Gibson served in the United States Army in the 65th Engineering Battalion from 1956 to 1958. He continued his education after leaving the army, and received his B.S. degree in structural engineering in 1962 from the Newark College of Engineering in Newark, New Jersey.

From 1950 to 1960, he worked as an engineer for the New Jersey Highway Department. Then in 1960, he was hired as the chief engineer for the Newark Housing Authority and was promoted to the position of New Jersey State Official Chief Structural Engineer for the City of Newark in 1966. In this role, Gibson held several community administration and management roles for the City of Newark and the Office of Mayor Hugh J. Addonizio. In 1970, Gibson was elected to the position of Mayor of Newark, New Jersey and served four consecutive terms from 1970 to 1986 – he was the first African American Mayor of Newark, New Jersey. Gibson also ran unsuccessfully for governor of New Jersey in 1981 and 1985.

During his career, he received numerous recognitions and awards for his public and government service. In 1964, Newark's Junior Chamber of Commerce named him Man of the Year. In 1976, Gibson was elected president of the United States Conference of Mayors, as the first African American to hold this position. In 1979, Gibson received the U.S. Senator John Heinz Award for Greatest Public Service by an Elected or Appointed Official, an award given out annually by Jefferson Awards Foundation.

Gibson was active in the National Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the YMCA and the YWCA. He headed Newark's Business

and Industry Coordinating Council, a job-finding organization, and served as vice-president of the United Community Corporation, an antipoverty agency.

Gibson passed away on March 29, 2019.

Kenneth Gibson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 31, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson was conducted by Harriette Cole on January 31, 2017, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Political leader Kenneth Gibson (1932 - 2019) was elected as the 34th Mayor of Newark, New Jersey and was the first African American elected mayor of any major Northeastern United States city. He served from 1970 to 1986.

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:

Gibson, Kenneth A.

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gibson, Kenneth A.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Political Leader

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 Kenneth Gibson, January 31, 2017. 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 Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_001,

TRT: 1:30:22 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson was born on May 15, 1932 in Enterprise, Alabama to Daisy Shipman Gibson and Willie Gibson. His maternal grandparents, Alice Shipman and Harrison Shipman, had seven children in Enterprise. After his maternal grandfather died, his grandmother worked as a domestic, and Gibson's mother helped raise her siblings. Gibson's father also grew up in Enterprise, where he was one of nine children born to Tiny Matthews Gibson and Daniel Gibson. Gibson's paternal grandfather later moved with their four daughters to Newark, New Jersey, while Gibson's father remained in Enterprise with his mother and brothers. He went on to meet and marry Gibson's mother, and found work as a butcher. Gibson began his education at the all-black Enterprise Academy. When he was seven years old, his family migrated north to Newark, where his father was hired at Swift and Company. His family moved into a rooming house, and Gibson enrolled at the integrated Monmouth Street School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_002, TRT: 2:28:31 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson grew up in Newark, New Jersey, where he attended the integrated Central High School. He joined the Jackie Bland Band, and played the saxophone at venues like the Adams Theatre. During World War II, Gibson's father canned military rations at Swift and Company, and his mother found work in a factory. Upon graduating from high school, Gibson enrolled in night classes at the Newark College of Engineering. Shortly afterwards, he was drafted into the U.S. military. He was trained at Fort Dix, New Jersey and Fort Riley, Kansas, and was then stationed in Hawaii with the 25th Infantry Division. During the Suez Crisis in 1956, the division was called to duty, but Gibson refused the orders because of the discrimination against black soldiers in the United States. At this point, he remembers being denied service while in uniform at a diner in St. Louis, Missouri. Gibson was discharged in 1958. He worked for the Newark Housing Authority, and completed his engineering degree in 1962.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_003, TRT: 3:29:40 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson worked for the Newark Housing Authority in Newark, New Jersey. He also helped found the Business and Industrial Coordinating Council, which partnered with local businesses to provide job training and opportunities to African American candidates. After an unsuccessful mayoral bid in 1966, Gibson accepted the role of chief structural engineer in Mayor Hugh Addonizio's administration. During the following summer, a black taxi driver was beaten by two Newark police officers. The African American community organized a demonstration in response, which led to a violent confrontation with the police. A number local businesses were looted, and the National Guard was sent to subdue the uprising. In 1970, Gibson was elected as the first African American mayor of Newark. He defeated the incumbent Mayor Addonizio, who was found guilty of conspiracy and extortion earlier that year. At this point, Gibson talks about the public education and criminal justice systems.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_004, TRT: 4:28:40 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson became the first African American mayor of Newark, New Jersey in 1970. When he took office, Newark had the highest rates of crime, infant mortality and tuberculosis in the nation. In response, Gibson

implemented programs to improve healthcare and housing conditions. He also developed relationships with the major businesses in downtown Newark, including the Prudential Life Insurance Company of America. In an attempt to revitalize the local economy, Gibson recruited top executives to serve as his advisors in city government positions. However, the city continued to experience problems as a result of the shrinking tax base. In 1976, Gibson became the first African American president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, which was a lobbying organization for the mayors of major cities. He also implemented an affirmative action plan for the City of Newark, which aimed to end the discriminatory hiring and promotional practices in municipal departments.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_005, TRT: 5:28:56 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson served as the mayor of Newark, New Jersey from 1970 to 1986. During that time, the city's population declined, and the African American community was weakened by the drug epidemic and discriminatory sentencing practices. Gibson implemented payroll taxes and parking taxes to combat the decrease in city revenue, and lobbied for aid from the U.S. Congress through the U.S. Conference of Mayors. In 1986, Gibson lost his reelection bid to Sharpe James, who was a former member of the Newark City Council. Gibson then returned to the private sector. He opened an engineering consulting firm called Gibson Associates, Inc., where he managed multimillion dollar contracts for public works projects. In 2000, he was indicted on charges of bribery, extortion and tax fraud. The trial ended in a hung jury, and Gibson pled guilty to tax evasion as a part of a plea agreement. At this point, Gibson reflects upon the treatment of African American politicians.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Gibson, Section A2017_042_001_006, TRT: 6:10:57 ?

The Honorable Kenneth Gibson reflects upon his legacy, and shares his advice to aspiring African American politicians. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.