

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Arrington, Richard
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr.,
Dates:	May 4, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:13:52).
Abstract:	Political leader Richard Arrington (1934 -) served as dean of Miles College and was the first African American mayor of the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Arrington was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 4, 2017, in Birmingham, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Political leader Richard Arrington was born on October 19, 1934 in Livingston, Alabama to Richard Arrington, Sr. and Mary Bell Arrington. Arrington graduated from Fairfield Industrial High School in Fairfield, Alabama in 1951. He went on to attend Miles College in Fairfield, Alabama where he earned his B.S. degree in biology in 1955; his M.S. degree in biology from the University of Detroit in Detroit, Michigan in 1957 and his Ph.D. degree in zoology from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma in 1966. Arrington later continued his post-doctoral work in higher education administration at Harvard University and the University of Michigan.

After graduating from the University of Detroit, Arrington returned to Miles College as an assistant professor of science from 1957 until 1963. In 1959, he served as a National Science Foundation Fellow in genetics at New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and in radiation biology at the Medical College of the State University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. Arrington then studied molecular biology at Washington University, St. Louis in 1960. He later returned to Miles College and served as acting dean and director of the summer school program. Arrington was then promoted to chair of the natural sciences department and became the dean of Miles College in 1966. In 1970, Arrington was named executive director of the Alabama Center for Higher Education and served until 1979. In the same year, he was hired as a part-time associate professor of biology at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. In 1971, Arrington was elected to the Birmingham City Council and won re-election in 1975. Arrington ran for mayor of the City of Birmingham and was elected as the first African American mayor in 1979. After twenty years as mayor, Arrington retired in 1999 and worked as a visiting professor of public service at the University of Alabama, Birmingham until his retirement in 2003. In 2008, he published his memoir, *There's Hope for the World*.

Arrington has seven children: Anthony, Kenneth, Kevin, Angela, Erica, Matthew and Jennifer.

Richard Arrington was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 4, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr. was conducted by Denise Gines on May 4, 2017, in Birmingham, Alabama, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Political leader Richard Arrington (1934 -) served as dean of Miles College and was the first African American mayor of the city of Birmingham, Alabama.

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:

Arrington, Richard

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Arrington, Richard--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 Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., May 4, 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 Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., Section A2017_094_001_001, TRT: 1:33:12 ?

The Honorable Richard Arrington was born on October 19, 1934 in Livingston, Alabama to Mary Bell Arrington and Richard Arrington, Sr. His maternal great-great-grandfather, Oliver Bell, was born around 1858 on a plantation in Livingston, where he remained after emancipation. Arrington's maternal grandparents, Ella Jones Bell and Fleece Bell, lived in Sumter County, Alabama,

where Arrington's mother was born and graduated from high school. Arrington's paternal great-grandmother, Ann Arrington, lived in a suburb of Livingston called York, Alabama. There, his paternal grandparents, Matthew Arrington and Barbara Arrington, raised thirteen children. Arrington's parents met after graduating from high school, and married following her parents' deaths. When Arrington was five years old, his family moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where his father found work in the steel mills. Arrington enrolled at Robinson Elementary School, where he skipped the fourth grade. He went on to attend Fairfield Industrial High School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., Section A2017_094_001_002, TRT: 2:31:08 ?

The Honorable Richard Arrington was active at the Crumbey Bethel Primitive Baptist Church in Fairfield, Alabama from an early age. Encouraged by his mother to pursue higher education, Arrington enrolled at Miles College in Fairfield, Alabama in 1951. He studied biology under Verdell Martin and Emmett Jones, and earned money by working at a dry cleaning shop. In 1955, Arrington left Alabama for the first time to enroll in a master's degree program at the University of Detroit Mercy. There, he struggled to adapt to the majority-white environment, and often felt ashamed if he was unable to answer a question in class. After graduating in 1957, Arrington joined the faculty of Miles College. He obtained a research fellowship to study radiology at the Iowa College of Medicine, and then studied molecular biology at the University of Washington in St. Louis. Arrington briefly returned to Miles College, and then began a Ph.D. degree at the University of Oklahoma in 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., Section A2017_094_001_003, TRT: 3:30:10 ?

The Honorable Richard Arrington earned a Ph.D. degree in zoology from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. He wrote his dissertation on beetle morphology under the supervision of entomologist Harley P. Brown, and was honored with an Ortenburger Award. During this time, he also raised a family with his first wife, Barbara Watts. Upon graduating in 1966, Arrington returned to Fairfield, Alabama as a departmental chairman and academic dean of Miles College. He also served as a government consultant for South Carolina's historically black colleges (HBCU). From 1970, Arrington directed the Alabama Center for Higher Education, which was an HBCU consortium located in Birmingham. Arrington was encouraged by his students to run for political office, and was elected to the Birmingham City Council in 1972. He served for two terms, and worked to improve black representation in city departments. He also became a leader in the struggle against police brutality.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., Section A2017_094_001_004, TRT: 4:29:20 ?

The Honorable Richard Arrington was elected mayor of Birmingham, Alabama in 1979, after black community leaders urged him to run in response to the police shooting of Bonita Carter. Arrington served as mayor for five terms, and received strong support from the city's black and white business owners. During his tenure, Arrington worked to diversify the municipal workforce. He increased the percentage of black employees at city hall from 12 to 50 percent, and appointed twelve African American department heads. He also worked to increase employment through a partnership with the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and by preventing federal agencies from moving to the suburbs. Arrington was instrumental in the founding of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and worked with President Jimmy Carter to secure U.W. Clemon's

appointment as a federal judge. Arrington resigned in 1999, when he failed to gain support for his development proposals and his plan to privatize the municipal water system.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Richard Ernest Arrington, Jr., Section A2017_094_001_005, TRT: 5:10:02 ?

The Honorable Richard Arrington resigned from the mayoralty of Birmingham, Alabama in 1999. He appointed William Bell, Sr. as his interim replacement. At this point, Arrington talks about the changes in Birmingham's black political leadership. After leaving office, Arrington taught courses in administration, government and history at Miles College and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He reflects upon his life and legacy, and concludes the interview by sharing a message to future generations.