

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Marion Barry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Barry, Marion, 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Marion Barry,
Dates:	August 7, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:31:22).
Abstract:	Mayor Marion Barry (1936 - 2014) was a Mayor of Washington D.C., a member of the Council of the District of Columbia, and the first chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Barry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 7, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2000_005
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Marion Barry was born in Itta Bena, Mississippi on March 6, 1936. From an impoverished family, he went on to become a vigorous civil rights activist and served four terms as Mayor of the District of Columbia. Barry grew up in Memphis, where he attended Booker T. Washington High School. During the City's 1958 bus desegregation drive, Barry received his first taste of public confrontation and media notoriety. Subsequently, he abandoned his doctoral studies in Chemistry at the University of Tennessee to join the civil rights movement full-time. Barry was elected the first chairman of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1965 to open a local chapter. He never left.

Barry quickly became a formidable politician in the nation's capital. In 1971, he was elected to serve on the city's first school board. Three years later, when Congress allowed local elections, Barry won a seat on the District of Columbia City Council. As the second elected mayor of Washington, D.C., Barry was known for building coalitions with marginalized populations, including African Americans, women and the LGBT community. Barry held that office for twelve years, until a misdemeanor drug conviction forced him to step down. After a brief hiatus, Barry made a triumphant return to political office when he won back a seat on the City Council. In 1994, enthusiastic supporters reelected Barry as mayor in a landslide victory. Barry resided in Washington, D.C. with his wife Cora.

Barry passed away on November 23, 2014 at age 78.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Marion Barry was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 7, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mayor Marion Barry

(1936 - 2014) was a Mayor of Washington D.C., a member of the Council of the District of Columbia, and the first chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

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:

Barry, Marion, 1936-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Barry, Marion, 1936- --Interviews

African American politicians--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington (D.C.)

Occupations:

Mayor

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 Marion Barry, August 7, 2000. 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 Marion Barry, Section A2000_005_001_001, TRT: 0:30:31 ?

Marion Barry, Jr. describes his mother's personality and discusses what he knows of his family's background, mentioning that he lost touch with his father after moving from Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee. Barry talks about his early childhood in Itta Bena, Mississippi, recalling details about the rural setting and relationships between cotton farmers and grocery store owners. Barry then describes his move to Memphis, focusing on the culture shock he experienced

transitioning from a rural setting to an urban setting. He explains how he adapted to life in the city by taking up a number of odd jobs, earning small amounts of money to help his family's impoverished situation. Barry discusses his childhood personality, explaining that his involvement in activities such as Sunday school, student government, and Scouting helped him to overcome his shyness and become a leader. Barry then describes his educational experience in Memphis, mentioning his favorite teachers and subjects, and saying he received a good education in spite of segregation.

Childhood and youth--Tennessee--Memphis.

Boy Scouts of America.

Segregation in education--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American children.

African American families--Tennessee--Memphis.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Marion Barry, Section A2000_005_001_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Marion Barry, Jr. talks about his high school days, describing how he spent leisure time with his friends. He explains that he first considered college as a senior, deciding to attend LeMoyne College in Memphis. Barry recalls his experience at LeMoyne, detailing the start of his activism. At LeMoyne he challenged a racist member of the College Board of Trustees. Barry's challenge won him front page newspaper headlines, and he was invited to speak at a rally at which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was featured. Barry gives a detailed description of the segregated social conditions in Memphis. Barry then describes his role in SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which grew out of his activist work while in graduate school at Fisk University in Nashville. Barry compares SNCC's methods and philosophy with that of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Barry says he admires both King and his organization, but also states that he and SNCC were less willing to accept compromise.

Education, Secondary--Tennessee.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)

LeMoyne-Owen College. Board of Trustees.

Social change--United States--History--20th century.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Public appearances.

Fisk University.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Marion Barry, Section A2000_005_001_003, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Marion Barry gives his impression of Washington, D.C. upon his arrival in 1965. He says he spent his first years in Washington performing social work with his organization Pride Incorporated. Barry then describes his first experience with city politics, winning the election to Washington's School Board, and eventually serving as the board president. Barry continues to describe his ascent in the city's government, talking about the social problems he addressed as a member of Washington's City Council from 1974-1978. He then explains how his sharp memory and mathematical skills helped him as a politician, and describes how his own view of politics changed as he went from activist to elected official. Barry digresses to tell about being shot in the chest by Hanafi Muslim radicals while a member of the City Council. Barry then details his first mayoral campaign, describing how he formed a coalition of traditionally

marginalized voters to defeat the establishment. Barry explains his political philosophy of empowerment, and describes his political relationship with the African American middle class.

Elections--United States--Washington (D.C.).

Attempted assassination.

School board presidents.

Mayors--Election.

Washington (D.C.). City Council.

African American political activists--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Marion Barry, Section A2000_005_001_004, TRT: 0:31:07 ?

Marion Barry talks about his relationship with white voters, saying he tried to reach out to them even when faced with heavy opposition. Barry notes that his support among white voters declined over the years. He shares stories about some of the African American politicians who influenced him, focusing on Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Barry then reflects on the negative times of his term as mayor of Washington, D.C., starting with regrets he had concerning policies he did not implement. He then discusses the drug and sex scandals that pervaded his time in office and the drug conviction that led to his resignation from office, hoping that history will remember his social achievements rather than his scandals. Barry explains that he used his time in prison to help rehabilitate his public image, which allowed him to gain re-election as mayor only three years after release. Barry talks about his retirement from the office of mayor and talks about his social work during retirement. Barry then discusses the current state of black politics, believing that political empowerment will lead to economic power for African Americans.

Mayors--Election.

Powell, Adam Clayton, Jr., 1908-1972

Substance abuse.

Retirement--African Americans.

Political corruption.

Politics--Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Marion Barry, Section A2000_005_001_005, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Marion Barry discusses his hopes and concerns for the black community. He says while African Americans are strong and full of vitality, the community must deal with social problems like crime and drugs. Barry cites the flight of black professionals from the inner city as another cause for concern. Barry says he cannot imagine having another career, and hopes that his legacy is inseparable from the social advancements he made as Mayor of Washington, D.C. Barry shares his thoughts on what being black means to him, and why he thinks African Americans are a unique people. He then explains his support for proposals instituting slavery reparations, and voices his support for oral history projects such as the HistoryMakers. Barry then narrates a series of photos he brought to the interview, which include images of Barry's family and Barry's time as Mayor of Washington.

Photographs.

African American youth--United States.

Crime and race--United States.

African American social reformers.