

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Roland Burris

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Burris, Roland W.   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | April 24, 2000  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2000  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:20:20).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | State attorney general, state comptroller, and U.S. senator The Honorable Roland Burris (1937 - ) was the first African American in Illinois elected to state office, where he served as state comptroller and as attorney general before being appointed to the United States Senate in 2008. Burris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2000_011   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in Centralia, Illinois, on August 30, 1937, Roland Burris received his bachelor's degree in political science from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1959. He then studied at the University of Hamburg, Germany, for a year before entering law school at Howard University.

Burris began his career in 1963 as a national bank examiner for the U.S. Treasury Department. This gave him the honor of being the first African American to examine banks in the United States. From 1964 to 1973, he served as vice president of Continental Illinois National Bank, making significant contacts in both the corporate and African American communities. Burris began his government career in 1973 as director of the Illinois Department of General Services. In 1978, with his election to the first of three terms as state comptroller, he made history as the first African American elected to state office. On November 6, 1990, Roland W. Burris was elected attorney general for the state of Illinois. At that time, the only African American ranking higher in state office was Douglas Wilder, the governor of Virginia. He served as Illinois attorney general from 1991 to 1995. In 1998, Burris unsuccessfully ran for the office of Governor of the State of Illinois.

After his public service career, Burris worked as an attorney with the Peters law firm in Chicago, where he specialized in environmental, consumer affairs and estate law. Previously, he was managing partner of the Chicago-based law firm of Jones, Ware & Grenard, one of the largest minority law firms in the country.

Burris returned to public service on December 30, 2008 when Governor Rod Blagojevich appointed him as a U.S. Senator, filling the seat formerly held by Barack Obama. On January 15, 2009, Burris was sworn in as a U.S. Senator, representing the State of Illinois.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Roland Burris was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 24, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. State attorney general, state comptroller, and U.S. senator The Honorable Roland Burris (1937 - ) was the first African American in Illinois elected to state office, where he served as state comptroller and as attorney general before being appointed to the United States Senate in 2008.

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# 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®.

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# 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.

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# Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Burris, Roland W.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Burris, Roland W.--Interviews

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African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews.

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African American politicians--Illinois--Interviews.

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Organizations:

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| HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)                    |
| The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection |
| Illinois  |
| Illinois  |
| Illinois  |

Occupations:

|                        |
|------------------------|
| State Attorney General |
| State Comptroller      |
| U.S. 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 Roland Burris, April 24, 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris talks about his childhood in Centralia, Illinois, where his father was a laborer for the Illinois Central Railroad and the family also ran a grocery store. The experience of integrating the public swimming pool as a teenager inspired Burris to aim for a career in law and public service. He talks about his values and drive for achievement, and he also shares information about his family history, which he has traced back several generations on both sides.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Centralia.

African American fathers.

Segregation.

African American families.

Recreation--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris talks about growing up in an African American neighborhood in Centralia, Illinois, where he was raised with a strong sense of value of community and respect for elders. He talks about his teenage years and his attendance at Southern Illinois University where he and other students integrated the downtown stores and restaurants by collecting evidence of discrimination which SIU dean Delyte Morris and attorney John Rendleman presented to the city council. Burris also talks about his time as an exchange student studying law in Germany and tells a story about his trip to Washington, D.C. to enroll at Howard University School of Law.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Centralia.

Southern Illinois University.

Segregation--Illinois--Carbondale.

Foreign study.

Howard University. School of Law.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris talks about his experiences at Howard University School of Law, his marriage and move to Chicago, Illinois where he worked first as a bank examine for the U.S. Treasury Department, then at Continental Bank; despite facing discrimination on the job, he became an officer in five years. Burris says that he had his sights set on a political career and worked toward this by joining many organizations, founding the Black Independent Voters Organization, and in 1968, waging his first campaign for the state legislature; although he lost, the race helped to establish his name and he continued working with other politicians and community groups.

Howard University. School of Law.

Banks and banking.

Voter registration.

Elections--Illinois.

Illinois--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris talks about his political career in Illinois state government during the 1970s and 1980s; he served much of that time as state comptroller, the first African American to be elected to a state-wide office in Illinois. He discusses many details of Illinois state politics and his involvement in independent political groups and other organizations such as the Jaycees and Operation PUSH. Burris also talks about his work at Continental Bank, where he faced blatant racism from white employees and some suspicion from other black employees when he was made the bank's first black officer.

Illinois--Politics and government.

Illinois. Comptroller's Office.

Elections--Illinois.

United States Jaycees.

Operation PUSH (U.S.).

Banks and banking.

Bank of America.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris details the changes he instituted upon taking office in 1979 as Illinois Comptroller. He then describes his accomplishments as Illinois Attorney General from 1991-1995, and he talks about his unsuccessful campaign for mayor of Chicago in 1995. He discusses the significance of being an African American trailblazer in these high state offices and the importance of building black political and economic power.

Illinois. Comptroller's Office.

Illinois. Attorney General's Office.

Elections--Illinois--Chicago.

Mayors--Illinois--Chicago--Election.

African Americans--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_006,  
TRT: 0:18:37 ?

Illinois politician and attorney Roland W. Burris talks about people who have influenced him and other black politicians from Illinois. He praises his wife, Berlean, as an important support and advisor to him and he details her own education and career in nursing and school administration.

Illinois--Politics and government.

African American families.

African Americans--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Roland Burris, Section A2000\_011\_001\_007,  
TRT: 0:30:15 ?

The Honorable Roland Burris narrates his photographs.

Photographs.