

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable George L. Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, George L., 1926-2006
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown,
Dates:	January 23, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:01:07).
Abstract:	Lieutenant governor and state representative The Honorable George L. Brown (1926 - 2006) was the first African American Colorado State Representative, State Senator and Lieutenant Governor. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 23, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_018
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The Honorable George Leslie Brown was born on July 1, 1926, in Lawrence, Kansas. Growing up on a farm in Kansas, Brown was a star athlete in basketball, football and track before graduating from Lawrence Liberty Memorial High School in 1944. During World War II, he served as a Tuskegee Airman.

Brown graduated from the University of Kansas in 1950 with a B.S. in journalism. He also did graduate work at Harvard Business School, the University of Colorado and the University of Denver. For fourteen years, he worked as a writer and editor for The Denver Post and hosted his own Denver radio talk show. He was the first African American editor to work for a major daily newspaper in the Rocky Mountains. Brown served as the assistant executive director for Denver's Public Housing Program for four years and taught at the University of Colorado and the University of Denver.

In 1955, Brown made history when he was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives. He served as a state senator for eighteen years, and was reelected to five consecutive four-year terms. Then, in 1974, in the middle of his fifth Senate term, he was elected lieutenant governor, a position he held for four years. He was the nation's first Black lieutenant governor.

In 1979, Brown joined the Grumman Corporation as vice president for marketing and was later promoted to senior vice president in charge of the firm's regional offices, becoming the first African American corporate officer in a major U.S. aerospace company. He completed Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program in 1980 and worked as Grumman's chief lobbyist in Washington, D.C., until he left Grumman in 1990. That year, Brown joined the Washington, D.C. law firm of Whitten & Diamond. In March 1994, he was named director for Prudential Securities and managed its Washington public finance office. He was a banker for Greenwich Partners from 1997 to 2000.

Brown was active on various boards and serves as a consultant and adviser for various organizations and companies. He received numerous awards and honors for his work. Brown was married to Modeen Brown. They had four daughters: Gail, Cindy, Kim and Laura.

Brown passed away on March 31, 2006 at age 79.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable George L. Brown was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 23, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lieutenant governor and state representative The Honorable George L. Brown (1926 - 2006) was the first African American Colorado State Representative, State Senator and Lieutenant Governor.

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:

Brown, George L., 1926-2006

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, George L., 1926-2006--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Colorado

Colorado

Occupations:

State Representative

Lieutenant Governor

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 George L. Brown, January 23, 2003. 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 George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_001, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

George L. Brown was born on July 1, 1926 on a farm on Lawrence, Kansas. His father, George Brown, was born in Reno, Kansas to a Cherokee mother and white German father, and worked as a farmer, mortician, and a houseman for fraternities at the University of Kansas. Brown's mother, Alberta Watson Brown, was born in Lawrence, Kansas. Her father was a former slave from Louisiana who was given his freedom and was able to buy the freedom of his wife in St. Louis. To avoid being sold back into slavery, the two of them moved immediately to Kansas City, Kansas. Brown's parents' first date was to a movie and he remembers the ball team his father coached and the university students his mother invited to perform at their home, including HistoryMaker Etta Moten Barnett and Langston Hughes. After the family moved into the city from the farm, Brown attended Lincoln Elementary School. Brown reflects on his parents' personalities, as well as those of his sisters, Harriet and Laura.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_002, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

George L. Brown was raised on his family's farm in Lawrence, Kansas where he was did chores, read adventure books, and also got into trouble. He attended Lincoln Elementary School and McAlister Grade School, as well as Liberty Memorial High School in Lawrence, Kansas, where he played football, basketball and track. On July 1, 1944, Brown enlisted in the U.S. Army in the Aviation Cadet Program. He was sent first to Biloxi, Mississippi for preflight training and then to Tuskegee, Alabama, where he completed his training as a Tuskegee Airman in 1945. After leaving the U.S. Army, Brown initially enrolled at the University of Kansas School of Engineering in Lawrence, Kansas, but received his B.S. degree in journalism from the University of Kansas School of Journalism in 1950. After graduation, Brown was hired by Edwin Palmer Hoyt and Edmund Dooley as a cub reporter for the Denver Post in Denver, Colorado.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_003, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

George L. Brown took college preparation courses at Liberty Memorial High School in Lawrence, Kansas and also at the University of Kansas. His mother, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, wanted him to be a performer and invited students in the fine arts at the University of Kansas to their house. During World War II, Brown trained as a Tuskegee Airman at Moten Field, where he knew other pilots like Wendell Pruitt and Benjamin Davis. After returning from the U. S. Army, Brown received money from the Fifty-Two Twenty Club and the G.I. Bill which paid for the University of Kansas. Brown graduated from the William Allen White School of Journalism in 1950 and became a cub reporter on the police beat for The Denver Post. He was later promoted to aviation editor and night city editor. He remained the night city editor in 1955 until he was elected to fill the Elvin Caldwell vacancy in the Colorado House of Representatives. In 1957, Brown was elected by thirteen votes into the Colorado State Senate, where he served until 1974.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_004, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

George L. Brown was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1955 and the Colorado State Senate in 1957, where he remained until 1974. Brown reflects on the history of African Americans in Colorado, including hotel owner Barney Ford who ensured African American men the right to vote in the state's 1876 constitution. Brown built his coalition of students, farmers, laborers, African Americans, women, and the elderly through his work in the Joint Budget Committee and with legislation like the Fair Employment Practices Law. While in the legislature, Brown also worked as the night city editor for the Denver Post, assistant director of Denver's Public Housing Administration, head of the Metra-Denver Urban Coalition, and as a sociology professor at the University of Denver, University of Colorado and Metropolitan State University of Denver. He also hosted his own Denver radio talk show. In 1974, Brown was elected lieutenant governor of Colorado, the first black lieutenant governor in the country.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_005, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

George L. Brown served nineteen years in the Colorado State Legislature and reflects on the changes that occurred in Denver, Colorado while he was in office, including gerrymandered districts, growth, lack of water, and pollution. After the Watergate Scandal in 1972, Brown witnessed a change in how politicians were covered in the press, which made it more difficult to be an effective politician. In 1975, Brown was elected lieutenant governor of Colorado on the Democratic ticket with Governor Richard "Dick" Lamm. Brown's responsibilities as lieutenant governor included balancing the budget and establishing ombudsman offices. He also assumed the responsibilities of Governor when Lamm left the state, causing friction between them after Brown pardoned a wrongly convicted man. In 1979, Brown's term in office ended and he became vice president of marketing at Grumman Aerospace Corporation in New York City, New York. Brown also reflects on the careers of Colorado HistoryMakers Joe Rogers and Wellington Webb.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_006, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

George L. Brown was hired as vice president for marketing at Grumman Aerospace Corporation in 1979 after meeting with fellow Tuskegee Airman Jean Esquerry and Grumman CEO John Bierwirth. Brown graduated from Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program in 1980, after which he became a senior vice president and the chief lobbyist for Grumman in Washington, D.C. At Grumman, Brown focused on lobbying for contracts dealing with space, transportation, and computer instruments rather than defense. Brown retired from Grumman in 1990, after which he worked at the law firm of Whitten and Diamond until 1994, at Prudential Securities from 1994 until 1997, and at Greenwich Partners from 1997 until 2000. Brown reflects on the differences between politics and the corporate world, including the money he made during his career in each. He also reflects on younger African American leaders, whether he would run for office again, and his influence on politicians like Pat Schroeder and HistoryMakers Charles Rangel and David Dinkins.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_007, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

George L. Brown reflects on contemporary politics, including the United States' foreign policy under President George W. Bush, political action committees, and the Electoral College. He shares stories about some of the politicians he has influenced, including HistoryMakers Congressman Charles Rangel and Mayor

David Dinkins, and on the decline of African Americans holding state-wide elected offices. He also shares a story about his experience on the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. In addition he reflects upon his legacy, his parents, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable George L. Brown, Section A2003_018_001_008, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

George L. Brown reflects on how Denver, Colorado became a diverse and supportive city for African American politicians and how it could serve as a prescription for other cities to follow to build coalitions. He also talks about endorsing HistoryMaker Ed Dwight to make a bust of him for the Denver capital building, which started Dwight's career in sculpture. Brown ends the interview by narrating his photographs.