

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles "Chuck" Turner

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Turner, Charles, 1940 or 1941-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 25, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:31:01).
<b>Abstract:</b>	City council member Charles "Chuck" Turner (1940 - 2019) served as a member of the Boston City Council for over ten years. He has advocated for fair employment practices within the city of Boston, as well as the rights of those living in under-served and minority communities. Turner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 25, 2005, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_080
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Boston, Massachusetts, civil rights activist Charles “Chuck” Turner was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1941. Turner was raised by his aunt, Mamie K. Faulkner, and his grandmother, Laura Troy Knight; his grandfather, Doctor Charles Henry Turner, was a pioneering animal behavior biologist, while his father, Darwin Turner, was a pharmacist.

Turner graduated from Harvard University in 1963 with his B.A. degree in government; he then spent a year in Washington, DC, reporting for *The Afro-American Newspaper*. Turner then moved north, first to New York, then to Hartford, where he joined the influential civil rights group the Northern Student Movement.

In 1966 Turner returned to the Boston area, joining the South End Neighborhood Action Program (SNAP) where he worked to help the community and assisted families who were losing their homes to gentrification. Turner formed a community action group which pressured the local government to provide trash clean-up in black neighborhoods and led demonstrations which highlighted how inadequately city inspectors enforced building codes in public housing.

A former leader of the United Community Construction Workers and one-time chair of the Boston Jobs Coalition, Turner spent several years crusading against job discrimination in the city. Turner campaigned for increased hiring of blacks on city construction jobs; in 1991, unsatisfied with the mayor’s enforcement of fair employment practices, he led a four hour sit-in at the mayor’s office, which resulted in a number of key concessions being made.

Turner also used his activism strategies and leadership skills to spearhead other community efforts; he played a leading role in a successful campaign to prevent the city from building a highway through predominantly black neighborhoods. Turner also chaired the Southwest Corridor Land Development Corporation.

Referred to as one of the best-known agitators in the city, Turner was elected to the Boston City Council in 1999, a position he held for over ten years. As a city council member, Turner continued his defense of civil and human rights; he authored an ordinance protecting transgendered people from discrimination. Turner successfully led an effort to protect the affirmative action guidelines of Massachusetts when Governor Mitt Romney sought to change them. As chairman of the Education Committee, Turner rallied against educational inequality in the Boston public schools.

Turner passed away on December 25, 2019.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner was conducted by Robert Hayden on March 25, 2005, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member Charles "Chuck" Turner (1940 - 2019) served as a member of the Boston City Council for over ten years. He has advocated for fair employment practices within the city of Boston, as well as the rights of those living in under-served and minority communities.

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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:

Turner, Charles, 1940 or 1941-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Turner, Charles, 1940 or 1941---Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews

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African American labor leaders--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews

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African American political activists--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Boston (Mass.). City Council.

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## Occupations:

City Council Member

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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## 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 Charles "Chuck" Turner, March 25, 2005. 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 Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner was born in 1940 in Cincinnati, Ohio to Cincinnati native and elementary school teacher Laura Knight Turner and Darwin Turner. An illness hospitalized Turner's mother for the rest of her life when he was four years old, so he was raised by his maternal grandmother, Laura Troy Knight. She was born in Cincinnati, where her family settled after her father, Samuel Troy, purchased his freedom in Virginia and brought his family to Ohio. Turner's father was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1895, graduated from the rigorous pharmacy program at the University of Chicago and owned pharmacies in Chicago, Illinois. Turner's paternal grandfather was Dr. Charles Henry Turner, the first African American to receive a bachelor's degree from University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio and also the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He became a well-known scientist and supported himself by teaching at high schools in St. Louis. Turner's parents divorced when he was one.

African American civic leaders--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews.

African American labor leaders--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews.

African American political activists--Massachusetts--Boston--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner's grandfather, Dr. Charles Henry Turner, was a pioneer in the field of animal psychology, but was not accepted by the scientific community during his time because of racial prejudice. Turner grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio in on his grandmother's land surrounded by lush flowers and fruit trees. Turner's brother, Darwin T. Turner, was a child prodigy, following in his mother's footsteps by graduating from college with his master's degree at age eighteen. There was a nine year difference between the brothers, so they did not grow up close. Turner felt a sense of isolation in his predominately white neighborhood. To cope, he was active at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and in Boy Scouts of America. He was also a strong student at Whittier Elementary and Walnut Hills High School. As a teenager, he worked on a riverboat that travelled along the Ohio River for a summer. He matriculated at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and he found adjusting to the culture there challenging.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner studied government and Middle Eastern history at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1963, he

was a writer for the Washington Afro-American in Washington, D.C., and interviewed Fannie Lou Hamer. In 1964, he worked as editor of a newsletter for Northern Student Movement and eventually became director, working with HistoryMakers Byron Rushing and Sarah-Ann Shaw. Following an arrest during a protest march in Hartford, Connecticut, Turner joined South End Neighborhood Action Project in Boston, Massachusetts. As an organizer, he fought against the gentrification of neighborhoods in Boston, Massachusetts. Turner appealed to the city to clean up trash dumped in Madison Park, but when no response was given, South End Neighborhood Action Project resolved to burn the trash. This led the city to finally clean up the park; however, they displaced a number of residents by building Madison Park High School. Turner also fought against the plan to expand I-95 in Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner became the first director of Northeastern University's African American institute in Boston, Massachusetts in 1969 while remaining co-chair of the Boston Black United Front. He was also the director of Circle Inc., an organization founded by HistoryMaker Willard Johnson. Minority construction workers were discriminated against in their unions even after integration, so Turner started the Third World Workers Association to help them find jobs. The organization was boycotted by unions. Turner gained support from city governments to open chapters throughout the state in Cambridge, Springfield, and Worcester. However, the organization lost funding during the Reagan administration. Turner served as the education director of Industrial Cooperative Association. In 1999, he was elected to Boston City Council and worked on educational initiatives and ex-offenders' rights. Turner talks about the influence of his spiritual beliefs on his political work, noting the influence of Elijah Muhammad.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:18 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner worked with Felix G. Arroyo to develop a conference at the University of Massachusetts Boston that focused on coalition building between Latinos, African Americans and other people of color in their efforts to incite community change. His wife has been his biggest supporter of his community reform efforts, even acting as treasurer in his campaign for the Boston City Council. Inspired by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Turner started the Fund the Dream campaign to work towards implementing King's vision. In reflecting on the importance of African American history, Turner notes the unique qualities and contributions of African Americans and shares his vision of how a new social movement might recreate American society. Turner also shares his thoughts about the importance of education and his desire for African American adults to mentor students. Turner reflects upon his aspirations, his life, and what he would like to be remembered for. He concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles "Chuck" Turner, Section A2005\_080\_001\_006, TRT: 0:01:23 ?

Charles "Chuck" Turner narrates his photographs.