

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bosley, Freeman
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr.,
Dates:	October 15, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:21:02).
Abstract:	Lawyer and mayor The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. (1954 -) was the first African American mayor of the City of St. Louis. He was also the first African American Circuit Clerk of Courts for the 22nd Judicial Circuit of St. Louis. He currently heads his own law firm, Bosley & Associates. Bosley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 15, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_289
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mayor and lawyer Hon. Freeman Robertson Bosley, Jr., the first African American mayor of St. Louis, Missouri, was born on July 20, 1954 in St. Louis to Marjorie Ellen and Freeman Bosley, Sr. Public service was instilled in Bosley by his father, a prominent citizen of “the Ville” in North St. Louis. Bosley, Sr. was elected city alderman in 1977 and unsuccessfully ran for mayor in 1985. Bosley attended Farragut Elementary School and was a student activist at the predominantly white Central High School, graduating in 1972. He enrolled at Saint Louis University, where he received B.A. degrees in urban affairs and in political science in 1976. During college, Bosley was mentored by Ernest Calloway, a civil rights activist and professor at Saint Louis University. Bosley went on to attend the Saint Louis University School of Law, earning his J.D. degree in 1979. While at Saint Louis University, Bosley was elected president of the Black Student Alliance and the Black-American Law Students Association.

After law school, Bosley worked as a staff attorney for the Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, specializing in consumer affairs and utility companies. He was later employed by the law offices of Bussey & Jordan. Inspired in law school by U.S. District Court Judge Clyde Cahill, Bosley helped in the political campaigns of Charles Quincy Troupe and Charles Bussey. In 1982, Bosley became the first African American Circuit Clerk of Courts for the 22nd Judicial Circuit, a position he held for ten years. During this time, he also served as the 3rd Ward Democratic Committeeman before being elected the St. Louis Democratic Party Chair in 1990. Bosley's political leadership set the stage for his successful mayoral run, winning the April 6, 1993 election with 66.5% of the vote.

Early in his term, Bosley oversaw the safe evacuation of 10,000 residents during the Great Flood of 1993. He later helped to orchestrate the \$70 million bailout of Trans World Airlines (TWA), resulting in the airline relocating its world headquarters to the city. He facilitated the move of the Los Angeles Rams football team to St. Louis in 1995, leading to a 2000 Super Bowl win. Bosley's administration passed two property tax increases, successes that

generated an additional \$40 million of revenue for the city. Bosley ran for re-election in 1997 but lost to the African American police chief, Clarence Harmon, in the Democratic Primary. Bosley also ran unsuccessfully for mayor in the Democratic Primary in 2001. After leaving office, Bosley practiced law with the law firm Caldwell & Singleton and joined two other former mayors, James Conway and Vincent Schoemehl, as leaders in the group Citizens for Home Rule. Bosley started his own law practice, Bosley & Associates, in 2004 and continues to serve as mentor to young legal and political hopefuls.

Bosley is divorced with a daughter, Sydney. He continues to live in the same North St. Louis neighborhood where he grew up.

Hon. Freeman Robertson Bosley, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 15, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 15, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lawyer and mayor The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. (1954 -) was the first African American mayor of the City of St. Louis. He was also the first African American Circuit Clerk of Courts for the 22nd Judicial Circuit of St. Louis. He currently heads his own law firm, Bosley & Associates.

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:

Bosley, Freeman

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Bosley, Freeman--Interviews

African American mayors--Missouri--Saint Louis--Interviews

African American lawyers--Missouri--Saint Louis--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Saint Louis (Mo.). Mayor

Occupations:

Lawyer

Mayor

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 Freeman Bosley, Jr., October 15, 2007. 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 Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. was born on July 20, 1954 in St. Louis, Missouri to Marjorie Robertson Bosley and Freeman Bosley, Sr. Bosley's maternal great-grandfather, George Robertson, fought in the Spanish-American War, before settling in St. Louis, where his son, Melvin Robertson, was born. Bosley's mother was raised in St. Louis as well, attending Simmons Elementary School and Charles H. Sumner High School. Following a confrontation with a white man, Bosley's paternal grandfather, Preston Bosley, moved from Little Rock, Arkansas to St. Louis, where he opened Yeatman Community Health Center and Yeatman Central City Foods, Inc., the first black-owned grocery store in the city. Bosley's father attended the DeVry Technical Institute in Chicago, Illinois, and upon graduating, returned to St. Louis to work as an electrician at General Electric. Later, he started Teek Records, one of the city's first black-owned record companies. In 1977, Bosley's father successfully ran for alderman in north St. Louis.

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Segregation in education--Illinois--Chicago.

Passing (Identity).

African Americans in sound recording industry.

DeVry Institute of Technology.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_002, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr.'s parents, Marjorie Robertson Bosley and Freeman Bosley, Sr., met at Charles H. Sumner High School in St. Louis, Missouri, and later married, despite objections from Bosley's maternal grandmother, Minnie Robertson. Bosley and his sister, Pamela Bosley Byes, were raised in the Fairgrounds Park neighborhood of St. Louis, where he attended Farrugut Elementary School, followed by Central High School, and was a member of Samaritan United Methodist Church. His aunt, June Bosley Hawkins, was among the first African Americans to sing opera on tour in Europe. As a boy, Bosley often hunted or fished with his father and grandfather. Bosley's maternal grandmother encouraged him to emulate prominent African American figures like Muhammad Ali, Julian Bond and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1977, Bosley's father was elected alderman of the city's 3rd

Ward, and although he ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1985, served over thirty years on the city council.

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American politicians--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Central High School (Saint Louis, Mo.).

African Americans--Race identity.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. began to learn more about Malcolm X after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As a student at Central High School, he participated in protests organized by his friend, St. Louis community activist James Robnett, Jr., for a more diverse teaching staff. He became more politically conscious at the predominantly white Saint Louis University, where he joined the Black Students Alliance, and advocated for a black studies program. Bosley began reading books on Marxist Leninism, communism, and black nationalism, and ignored his mother's warnings of possible FBI surveillance of the book store he frequented. Upon graduating in 1972, Bosley studied political science at Saint Louis University, and matriculated at Saint Louis University School of Law. During his first year, Bosley helped with his father's campaign for alderman. He struggled to pay his way through law school, and joined the graduate chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

African American college students--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American student movements--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Politics and government.

United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Black nationalism--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr.'s professors at Saint Louis University School of Law in St. Louis, Missouri included Gerald T. Dunne, J. Norman McDonough and Michael A. Wolff, who was later appointed to the Supreme Court of Missouri. Bosley completed an internship at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri the summers following his second and third year of law school. Upon graduating in 1979, Bosley applied for a permanent position at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, but was rejected in favor of white lawyers from outside of the community. Bosley reapplied, citing the Legal Services Corporation Act, which stated employees should come from the Legal Services community in the St. Louis metropolitan, and was offered a position in the consumer department. Bosley worked there for two years. With his father's help, Bosley campaigned to become the clerk of courts; and in 1982, was elected at age twenty-eight. He reformed the clerk's office by hiring a new staff, which included some of his campaign staff.

Political campaigns--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Education (Higher).

Legal aid----Missouri.

Legal Services of Eastern Missouri.

Clerks of court--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American law students.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Officials and employees--Selection and appointment.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_005, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. was clerk of the circuit court in St. Louis from 1982 to 1993. When the chairman of the Democratic Party in St. Louis stepped down in 1988, Bosley, who was the vice chairman, ran a successful campaign, becoming the first African American chairman. Bosley then decided to run for mayor. In preparation, he built a community following, and supported President Bill Clinton's presidential bid in 1992, and Mel Carnahan campaign for governor of Missouri. Bosley announced his mayoral candidacy in 1992, and was elected as the first African American mayor of St. Louis in 1993. During his term, he organized a Midnight Basketball program to decrease youth violence. The project was successful, but when the directors embezzled over \$60,000, Bosley was accused of corruption, and the program ended. Bosley talks about promoting political engagement amongst voters in St. Louis, where voter participation numbers are low, despite the high number of registered citizens.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Politics and government.

African American politicians--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Presidents--United States--Election.

Democratic Party (Mo.).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_006, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. was voted mayor of St. Louis Missouri in 1993. He led a grassroots campaign, gaining support from the city's African American, Jewish, middle class, and gay communities. He also secured the support of African American churches and a small fraction of the white community. The campaign was strenuous, and Bosley relied on his wife, Darlynn Cunningham Bosley, to help care for their young daughter, Sydney Bosley. On election night, friends from around the country, including rapper Nelly and actor Cedric the Entertainer, joined Bosley to celebrate his victory. During his tenure, Bosley focused on restoring roads and parks, creating jobs and helped recruit the St. Louis Rams. He appointed African Americans to a number of city positions, and required that city officials hired more women and minority contractors. In 1993, he made the decision to evacuate South St. Louis during a flood, against the residents' wishes. Bosley did not win his bid for reelection in 1997.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Politics and government.

African American politicians--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American mayors--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Political campaigns--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Race relations--Political aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr., Section
A2007_289_001_007, TRT: 0:23:20 ?

The Honorable Freeman Bosley, Jr. encountered prejudiced white voters in South St. Louis, Missouri, and received threats during his 1993 mayoral campaign. In 1997, the white community supported Clarence Harmon, who was also African American and the chief of police, and Bosley lost his bid for reelection. In the primary election, however, Harmon received only 5 percent of the white vote, as the majority of white residents voted for Francis Slay. In 2001,

Bosley again earned the majority of African American votes, but not enough to win back the mayor's office. He returned to practicing law and opened his own private practice, Bosley and Associates LLC. Although Bosley retired from politics, he began advising young politicians. He talks about his daughter, Sydney Bosley, as well as his concerns for the African American community in St. Louis. Bosley also reflects upon his time as mayor, his legacy, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Politics and government.

Political campaigns--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Elections--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Politics and government--Missouri--Saint Louis.