

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Russell Branham

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Branham, Charles R. (Charles Russell), 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham,
Dates:	November 3, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:44:10).
Abstract:	History professor Charles Russell Branham (1945 -) was the senior historian at the DuSable Museum of Afro-American History and a professor of history at various universities, including Chicago State University, Roosevelt University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Northwestern University, and Indiana University Northwest. Branham was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 3, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_119
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian Charles Russell Branham was born on May 25, 1945 in Chicago, Illinois to Charles Etta Halthon and Joseph H. Branham. Branham graduated from Manassas High School in Memphis, Tennessee in 1963. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Rockford College in 1967 and earned his Ph.D. in history in 1980 from The University of Chicago where he was a Ford Foundation Fellow.

Branham has been a professor of history at various colleges in Chicago, including Chicago State University and Roosevelt University. From 1974 through 1985, he taught at The University of Illinois at Chicago where he was awarded the Silver Circle Excellence in Teaching Award. From 1985 through 1991, Branham was an Associate Professor at Northwestern University, and from 1991 through 1997, an Associate Professor at Indiana University Northwest. In 1984, Branham began working as an historian at the DuSable Museum of Afro-American History where he served as Director of Education and is now Senior Historian. Branham is the author of many publications on African American history and politics, including *The Transformation of Black Political Leadership in Chicago, 1865 – 1943*.

Branham is a member of the Organization of American Historians and the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. He served on the Board of Directors for The Chicago Metro History Fair, DuSable Museum of African American History, the Illinois Humanities Council and on the Executive Committee for the Chicago Archives of the Blues Tradition. From 1989-1990, he was the Chairman of the United Way of Chicago's Committee on Race, Ethnic and Religious Discrimination. In addition, Branham has served as a consultant to the Chicago Board of Education for their curriculum development for a Black History study unit. Branham also sat on the Board of Trustees for Rockford College from 1990 to 1992. He won an Emmy Award as the writer, co-producer and host of "The Black Experience," the first nationally televised series on African American History. In 1983, Branham was an expert witness in the PACI case which forced the City of Chicago to give greater political

representation to African Americans, and in 1990, his testimony before the Chicago City Council laid the foundation for the city's minority business affirmative action program.

Branham was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 3, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles Russell Branham was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 3, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. History professor Charles Russell Branham (1945 -) was the senior historian at the DuSable Museum of Afro-American History and a professor of history at various universities, including Chicago State University, Roosevelt University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Northwestern University, and Indiana University Northwest.

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:

Branham, Charles R. (Charles Russell), 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Branham, Charles R. (Charles Russell), 1945---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Historian

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Russell Branham, November 3, 2008. 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 Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Charles Russell Branham was born on May 25, 1945 in Chicago, Illinois to Charles Hurd Branham Halthon and Joseph Branham. Branham's paternal family descended from Portuguese immigrants who fled to Virginia during the Spanish Inquisition. In Georgia, his paternal ancestor, William Branham, was a minister, and his sister, Crystal Watson, was the mother of educator John Brown Watson. Branham's paternal grandparents lived in Denison, Texas, where his father was born. They moved to Chicago, Illinois, where Branham's paternal grandfather ministered at Olivet Baptist Church under pastor Lacy Kirk Williams, and his father became a minister as well. Branham's maternal great-grandfather, John Hurd, fought in Mississippi's 3rd U.S. Colored Cavalry during the Civil War. Branham's maternal grandfather, William Hurd, moved to Tennessee, where Branham's grandmother died in a fire shortly after his mother was born. His mother went on to attend LeMoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee, and became a teacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_002, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Charles Russell Branham's mother was a teacher in Memphis, Tennessee, and met his father while he was attending a conference. They moved to Chicago, Illinois, where Branham and his sisters, twins Cathryn Branham and Carol Branham, were born. Branham's family lived on Chicago's South Side, where he attended the Stephen A. Douglas School. He was a good student, although he once skipped a week of school to go to the beach. After his parents' divorce, Branham's mother moved her children to her older sister's home in Memphis, where her younger sister's family was also living. In Memphis, Branham began the third grade at Lincoln Elementary School. He was close to his cousins and his uncle, Reverend Johnson, and often practiced preaching at home. Branham was a talkative child at school, but began reading instead when his fifth grade teacher seated him beside her desk. He went on to attend Manassas High School, where he participated in the American Legion Boys State.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_003, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Charles Russell Branham was the governor of Tennessee's all-black American Legion Boys State, and gave a well-received speech at the convention in Nashville. Nevertheless, the white Boys State governor was chosen to attend Boys Nation. Branham marched for civil rights in segregated Memphis, Tennessee, but did not tell his mother, who feared for his safety. At church, Branham debated integration with his fellow students. He was popular at Manassas High School, and emceed a show with musician Isaac Hayes. Branham also worked for the Memphis World, a local African American newspaper, where he wrote a column about his fellow students, earning him money and the respect of his peers. Although he does not recall being mentored in high school, Branham was a successful student. The death of a friend in the Vietnam War dissuaded him from entering the U.S. Army after graduation. Instead, he enrolled at the mostly-white Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois, where he struggled during his freshman year.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_004, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Charles Russell Branham attended Rockford College, a conservative school in Rockford, Illinois, where his roommates often made racist comments. Branham was elected class president twice; and, as student body president, met gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan. Although Branham intended to study political science, he eventually switched to history, and gained confidence with

the encouragement of his history professors, Russell Planck and Gordon Ross. Branham was invited to an event at the University of Chicago, where he competed for a Ford Foundation fellowship to attend graduate school. During the event, he met historian John Hope Franklin, and received funding to attend the University of Chicago. After working in factories during the summer, Branham began his graduate program, where he was mentored by Franklin, and took classes from professors Richard C. Wade and Daniel J. Boorstin. In Chicago, he lived in his paternal grandmother's basement, and spent most of his time studying.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_005, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Charles Russell Branham received funding for his graduate studies at the University of Chicago with help from historian John Hope Franklin. In his second year, Branham began teaching African American history at Chicago State College and Roosevelt University, and built his own curriculum. He also taught history at the Communiversity; befriended political activists like Bobby Rush and Oscar Brown, Jr.; and participated in sit-ins at the University of Chicago. In 1972, Branham was hired by Chicago's WTTW-TV to write and host 'The Black Experience,' a documentary series about African American life. He interviewed scholars throughout the country, including Franklin and Herbert Gutman, a historian of slavery. He also met director John Tweedle at the station. The show received an Emmy Award after Branham returned to his graduate studies. Branham completed his dissertation on African American politics in Illinois, and was hired to teach at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_006, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Charles Russell Branham was recruited to the University of Illinois at Chicago by historian Gilbert Osofsky, who died the summer before Branham began teaching. In the 1980s, Branham worked in local politics in Chicago, Illinois. He supported aldermanic candidates Albert Raby and Richard H. Newhouse, Jr., and testified about Chicago's history of voter disenfranchisement in a case brought by the Political Action Conference of Illinois against the city, which led to redistricting of the city's wards. He also contributed to the 1984 Democratic National Convention platform. Branham supported Harold Washington's first mayoral campaign, and helped produce Washington's radio commercials. After Washington's death, Branham was hired to create an exhibit about him for the Harold Washington Library. Branham taught at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois until 1987, when he joined Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History as its senior historian. Branham also reflects upon his life and research.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_007, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Charles Russell Branham created an exhibition about the history of Provident Hospital in Chicago, Illinois, and donated the materials to the DuSable Museum of African American History after the hospital attempted to discard them. He also served as consultant for 'The Killing Floor,' a television program about labor unions in Chicago. In 2003, Branham testified on behalf of the City of Chicago when its affirmative action policies were challenged by local contracting companies. Although the city lost the lawsuit, it rewrote its policies so that the affirmative action programs remained in place. Branham describes his experiences of police harassment throughout his time in Chicago. On one occasion, he was attacked by a police officer with a gun, and his friends who

were familiar with the police department advised him not to file a report to prevent retaliation. Branham also reflects upon his family and friends, his concerns for the African American community and his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Russell Branham, Section A2008_119_001_008, TRT: 0:19:50 ?

Charles Russell Branham describes how he would like to be remembered, and narrates his photographs.