

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Frederick C. Ford

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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>	Ford, Frederick, 1926-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 31, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Real estate executive Frederick C. Ford (1926 - ) was the vice president of Draper and Kramer real state developers. Ford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 31, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_028
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Prominent business and civic leader Frederick C. Ford was born on August 27, 1926 in St. Louis, Missouri. The youngest of six children of Florence and Lafayette, a housewife and a postal clerk, Ford attended Sumner High School in St. Louis. As an accounting student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he served as treasurer of the national accounting honorary society and president of the student senate. Ford received a B.A. and an M.S. in accountancy from the University of Illinois.

After graduation Ford worked as an accountant at Mary T. Washington and Company in Chicago. In 1951, he began working as a staff accountant at Draper and Kramer, a Chicago firm founded in 1893 to finance real estate and provide management services. Ford rose through the ranks at Draper and Kramer, eventually serving as executive vice president and chief financial officer. A dedicated civic leader, he was the first African American president of Chicago's largest club, the Union League Club, where he has volunteered for thirty-four years. Ford also served as vice president of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, and he was a member of the Gary Board of School Trustees for eight years, two of which he served as president. In Gary, he founded the Gary Educational Development Foundation, dedicated to improving elementary and secondary schools, and served as vice chairman. He continues to chair the Foundation's Investment Committee.

Ford is vice chairman of the board of directors at Draper and Kramer and a trustee of Elmhurst College. A member of the Economic Club of Chicago and the Financial District Rotary Club of Chicago, he has two children with his wife, Dorothy, whom he married in 1953. Their son, Lafayette, works as a banker, and their daughter, Rebecca, is an attorney at Draper and Kramer.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Frederick C. Ford was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 31, 2003, in

Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Real estate executive Frederick C. Ford (1926 - ) was the vice president of Draper and Kramer real state developers.

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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:

Ford, Frederick, 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ford, Frederick, 1926---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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## Occupations:

Real Estate Executive

# HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Frederick C. Ford, January 31, 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).

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## 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 Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Frederick C. Ford was born on August 27, 1926 in St. Louis, Missouri. His mother, Florence Lucille Ellis, was born on January 30, 1892 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Ford's maternal grandfather came to New Orleans at the age of twelve as a stowaway on a ship from France. His mother worked as a seamstress and moved to St. Louis, Missouri at age twenty. His father, Lafayette Ford was born on a farm in Tupelo, Mississippi in 1874. Ford's parents married around 1913 and had six children. His father was a schoolteacher in Mississippi, worked as a Pullman Porter, and finally was a postal clerk in St. Louis. His father was interested in business and studied Latin while working on the railroad. Ford's older siblings were entrepreneurs and ran a number of businesses, including selling candy and pies, opening three Turf Grill restaurants, and selling juke

boxes. Ford remembers helping sort and fill bags of candy for his brothers to sell at Christmastime.

Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:26  
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Frederick C. Ford describes his childhood and school activities. Ford grew up in the Ellisville neighborhood of St. Louis, Missouri and remembers men who sold bacon skins, ice, milk, and watermelon, a man who collected rags, and a man who lit the gas street lights. Ford also remembers listening to Joe Louis fights on the radio and marching down the street with his friends when Louis beat Jack Sharkey. Ford attended John Marshall Grade School and was active in the YMCA. He attended summer camp and recalls taking canoe trips. He also took part in the YMCA National Conference in Miami, Ohio and the Y Circus. Although he was eligible for the National Honor Society, his application was delayed out of fear that he would be elected President. When he was later accepted, he declined the membership. After graduating from Sumner High School, Ford chose to attend the University of Illinois because he wanted to major in accounting. Since Missouri schools were segregated, the state of Missouri paid his tuition.

Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:10  
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Frederick C. Ford describes attending the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. While the university was desegregated, Ford and other students participated in sit-ins at local restaurants and bars in 1944 which successfully integrated the town. Ford comments on the positive influence that the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity provided him and how fraternities are not as positive today. Ford was actively involved in campus activities, including the student senate and working as a waiter. He met HistoryMakers Earl Strayhorn, William Cousins, and Earl Neal while in college. Ford graduated with his B.S. degree in Accounting and passed the CPA exam in 1952. After graduating, Ford worked as an accountant at Mary T. Washington and Company in Chicago, Illinois. In 1951, he began working as a staff accountant at Draper and Kramer after being approached by Robert Taylor, a housing activist, who knew Ferdinand Kramer was looking to hire the firm's first black employee.

Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:35  
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Frederick C. Ford describes the history of two urban renewal development deals, Lake Meadow and Prairie Shores, that his firm Draper and Kramer were involved in. Although Ford was the first black employee at Draper and Kramer, he states that he experienced no racial problems which he attributes to company President Ferdinand Kramer, his comfort in integrated situations as well as his height and commanding voice. Ford describes his management philosophy as being fair and honest, and he reflects on his handling of hiring decisions that he regretted and other personnel issues. Working at Draper and Kramer for fifty-one years, Ford started in accounting and worked his way up through management until he eventually became the Executive Vice President and Assistant to the President. Among his many civic activities, Ford was appointed to the Gary, Indiana school board in the 1960s where he encouraged parental involvement and oversaw a failed experiment allowing a private company to run the public school system.

Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:35  
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Frederick C. Ford reflects upon his over fifty year career at Draper and Kramer

and having an insider's view to the dynamics of a family-run business. As Vice Chairman of the company, Ford mentored the chairman, Douglas Kramer who was the son of the company's founder, Ferdinand Kramer. Ford's hope for the black community is economic independence. He advises people interested in business to gain hands on experience and contrasts formal training versus having a business instinct. Although Ford's father died in 1947, his mother lived long enough to see her son's success. Ford sees his legacy as his ability to help others become more independent and improve communities. Ford concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Frederick C. Ford, Section A2003\_028\_001\_006, TRT: 0:04:16  
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Frederick C. Ford narrates his photographs.