

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Ronald Dellums

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dellums, Ronald V., 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums,
Dates:	February 15, 2013, June 17, 2013 and March 13, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003 and 2013
Physical Description:	16 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (7:49:29).
Abstract:	U.S. congressman The Honorable Ronald Dellums (1935 - 2018) served as a congressman from Northern California's 9th District and was president of Healthcare International Management Co. Dellums was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 15, 2013, June 17, 2013 and March 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_042
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Congressman Ronald V. Dellums was born November 24, 1935, in Oakland, California. After graduating from high school, Dellums joined the U.S. Marine Corps, where he was selected for Officer Candidate School. After completing his tour, Dellums went to Oakland City College, where he earned his A.A. degree. Dellums later went to San Francisco State University and then to the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his M.A. degree in social work.

After completing his master's degree, Dellums went to work with the California Department of Mental Hygiene as a psychiatric social worker in 1962 and remained there for two years. Dellums was hired as the program director of the Bayview Community Center in 1964, and a year later became the associate director and, later, director of Hunters Point Youth Opportunity Center. In 1967, Dellums was elected to the Berkeley City Council, and also began work as a part-time lecturer at San Francisco State College and the Berkeley Graduate School of Social Welfare. Dellums was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1971, where he served until his retirement in 1998.

As a congressman during the Vietnam War, Dellums began calling for peace and disarmament; he studied foreign and military policy, and served on the Armed Services Committee. During the course of the war, President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew accused Dellums of being a "radical" and a "commie pinko" for his views. Surviving these attacks, Dellums went on to challenge President Ronald Reagan's desire to increase military spending and later required President George Bush to secure congressional approval before attacking Iraq in the Gulf War. Dellums also proposed a national healthcare bill in 1977 and spent years trying to push it through Congress.

Dellums continued to speak about disarmament and finding peaceful solutions to international conflicts; he also

maintained a strong interest in civil rights and environmental issues. Dellums authored several books, including his autobiography, *Lying Down With the Lions: A Public Life from the Streets of Oakland to the Halls of Power*. Dellums served as the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, and the University of California, Berkeley, has created an endowed chair in his name in the Peace and Conflict Studies Department.

Dellums was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 13, 2003, February 15, 2013 and June 17, 2013.

Ronald Dellums passed away on July 30, 2018.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on February 15, 2013, June 17, 2013 and March 13, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 16 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. U.S. congressman The Honorable Ronald Dellums (1935 - 2018) served as a congressman from Northern California's 9th District and was president of Healthcare International Management Co.

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:

Dellums, Ronald V., 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Dellums, Ronald V., 1935---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

California

Occupations:

U.S. Congressman

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 Ronald Dellums, February 15, 2013, June 17, 2013 and March 13, 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 Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_001, TRT: 0:29:49 ?

Ronald Dellums gives a family history of his mother's side. He tells how his mother grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and how her siblings came from Texas to West Oakland and created a transplanted family network. He then talks in depth about his grandmother and the positive influence she had on him and the values she instilled. Dellums gives the background of his father's family and talks about the different ethnicities that comprise his family tree. Then he tells how his father moved to California after his brother C.L. Dellums, where he eventually met his wife. Ronald Dellums then explains how his father, C. L. Dellums and A. Philip Randolph organized the first black trade union in American history, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Ronald Dellums discusses C. L. Dellums's achievements as a union leader and civil rights activist.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Ronald Dellums recounts memories of his uncle C. L. Dellums and, among other stories, tells about how C. L. told him to "never become a politician." He then describes one of his earliest memories that, when playing by the street curb, a truck nearly backed over his legs. Dellums touches upon the multicultural atmosphere of West Oakland during the late 1920s. He explains how Southerners who moved to Oakland perceived him and how he then began to regain his southern speech style. Then, he goes into more detail about how West Oakland's cultural characteristics paralleled that of a southern environment. Ronald Dellums then tells of an extremely religious phase he went through when he was approximately eleven, as well as some of his traits as a youth.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_003, TRT: 0:30:42 ?

Ronald Dellums tells the story of a knife attack he experienced as a youth. He talks about being surrounded by violence and crime but luckily having his family and friends to shield him from a criminal life. Then he talks about switching from Catholic to public schools and his opinions toward education during junior high and high school. Dellums speaks about his parents' separation and explains how he still remained in close contact with his father. He then moves forward in time and tells about when, after his divorce from his first wife, he lived with his father and about the experiences they shared. Dellums discusses some of the things he learned about his father during those years and briefly explains why his father was always in the shadow of his brother C. L. Dellums. Going back to his high school days, Dellums talks about being offered a scholarship to the University of California at Berkeley and the reasons why he eventually lost the scholarship. He tells the story of how he broke this news to h

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_004, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Ronald Dellums discusses the disappointment he faced in the U.S. Marines, but admits that his experience there was a positive one overall. He explains how confidence and discipline were instilled in him through his Marine training and how he used these new traits to his advantage when he returned home and started college. Dellums describes his educational drive at San Francisco State and how his success there influenced him to attend graduate school. He talks about his financial struggles to afford graduate school and then about the fellowship he received that relieved the situation. Ronald Dellums shares his motivation behind entering psychiatric social work and about his first jobs in the field. He then discusses an experience that made him rethink his career path and led him to focus on helping oppressed people and their issues. Dellums explains how this new line of work brought him closer to the political community and eventually led him into politics.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_005, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

Ronald Dellums talks about the excitement he and his family had in their plans to relocate to Massachusetts in order for him to work on his Ph.D. at Brandeis University. Dellums explains the chain of events that changed his Brandeis plans and led him to becoming a member of the Berkeley City Council. He speaks about the infrastructure of the council and then about the differences between Oakland and Berkeley. Dellums explains how Berkeley was a hotbed for activism during the 1960s. He describes how the various activist groups became involved with each other's issues and how that propelled Berkeley's liberal national reputation. Ronald Dellums talks about how Berkeley's open-minded attitude helped him to be elected to the U.S. Congress.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_001_006, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Ronald Dellums talks about being impressed by Robert Scheer and about how he attempted to join Scheer's campaign with Otho Green's. He then describes how, while a member of U.S. Congress, he was verbally attacked by Spiro Agnew. Dellums then goes into depth about the press conference that followed, the questions that were asked, how he responded and the overall outcome. He describes how he was treated when he entered the U.S. Congress in 1971 and was viewed as a radical because of the issues he brought forth. Ronald Dellums explains how, over time, his patience in Congress gained him respect.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_002_007, TRT: 7:29:35 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums' mother encouraged him to pursue college. When Dellums was assigned to vocational classes at McClymonds High School in Oakland, California, his mother transferred him to Oakland Technical High School. There, he performed so well academically that he was offered a scholarship to attend the University of California Berkeley. However, after he was rejected from the baseball team, Dellums' motivation lagged and he lost his scholarship. He enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps for two years, and then enrolled at Oakland City College. Dellums later transferred to San Francisco State University, where he received his bachelor's degree in social work and psychology. Next, he earned his master's degree in clinical social work at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1970, Dellums decided to run for U.S. Congress, gathering multiracial support from the major social movements of the time. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives that year.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_002_008, TRT: 8:29:17 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums formulated his political philosophy early on under the influence of his family. His paternal uncle, C.L. Dellums, helped A. Philip Randolph organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and his father, Verney Dellums, was among the first African American longshoremen in Berkeley, California. Dellums also learned to be open minded through his social work background. He became especially encouraged after seeing Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak in Berkeley. Dellums' political philosophy was further developed by the major social movements in the San Francisco Bay Area. Defeating Jefferey Cohelan in the Democratic primary, Dellums was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970. During his campaign, he had gained a reputation as a radical, and was criticized by Vice President Spiro Agnew prior to his arrival in Washington, D.C. Once there, Dellums was received with apprehension by both Democrats and Republicans for what others called his radical politics.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_002_009, TRT: 9:34:04 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums hired a congressional staff that included future congresswoman Barbara Lee, future state legislator Sandre Swanson and Donald R. Hopkins, who served as his chief of staff. Upon arriving at Capitol Hill, Dellums was mentored by Michael Duberstein, but greeted with hostility by most of his new colleagues. In the beginning of his term, he was often ignored while speaking on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1971, Dellums collaborated with other African American congresspersons such as Charles Diggs, Shirley Chisholm, Charles B. Rangel and Louis Stokes to form the Congressional Black Caucus. The caucus became a forum for the members to collaborate on similar political interests. During his time in Congress, Dellums organized and held hearings on the war crimes that took place during the Vietnam War. He was also one of the few Democrats to oppose the War Powers Resolution of 1973. Dellums went on to join the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_002_010, TRT: 10:32:01 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums' experience in the U.S. Marine Corps prepared him well to serve on the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, but he was met with resistance when he attempted to join the committee. Dellums was rejected initially due to his anti-war stance, but with the help of Louis Stokes and William Clay, Sr., he convinced the committee chair to reconsider. Dellums became the first African American on the committee, where he was met with hostility. Nevertheless, Dellums remained vocal in his opinions, and promoted debate in the committee. He successfully pushed an amendment to end the LGM-118 Peacekeeper missile system; and despite initial pushback from his colleagues, he gained bipartisan support. Dellums also advocated to discontinue the use of the B-2 stealth bomber, and debated Senator Sam Nunn on the issue. Eventually, Dellums garnered Nunn's support. He also formed a working relationship with Marvin Leath of Texas, who invited Dellums to speak in his home district.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_002_011, TRT: 11:32:23 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums was approached in 1972 by African American employees of the Polaroid company. They explained that Polaroid cameras were used to maintain South African apartheid, and asked the Congressional Black Caucus to help them convince the company to divest. Dellums volunteered his

assistance. He also participated in the creation of the National Black Political Assembly in 1972. Four years later, he was nominated by the organization to run for president of the United States, but he declined the nomination. Dellums was nominated again in 1980; however, he insisted on continuing his political fights from Congress. During this time, Dellums continued lobbying against the apartheid in South Africa. After gaining significant support, he successfully passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, which called for sanctions against South Africa and the release of all political prisoners. President Ronald Reagan vetoed the bill, but due to its bipartisan support, Congress overrode this veto.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_003_012, TRT: 12:32:21 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums rarely focused on fundraising during his congressional campaigns, and instead relied mostly on direct mailing. He announced his retirement from U.S. Congress in 1997, prompting a special election in which Barbara Lee assumed his seat. After retirement, Dellums joined HealthCare International Management Company, where he urged for action on the AIDS crisis in Africa. Over the following years, Dellums worked with Lee to create the World Bank AIDS Marshall Plan Trust Fund Act. He also partnered with Bristol-Myers Squibb to help create Secure the Future, a \$5 million fund for free AIDS-related medical treatments. After speaking to Congressman Jim Leach, Dellums encouraged the collaboration between Leach and Lee that resulted in the Global AIDS and Tuberculosis Relief Act of 2000. President Bill Clinton appointed Dellums to the position of chairman of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, and he was later reappointed by President George W. Bush.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_003_013, TRT: 13:30:48 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums encouraged Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson to advise President George W. Bush to create an AIDS initiative. This resulted in Bush's development of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which aimed to lessen the impact of AIDS globally, with a focus on Africa. During this time, Dellums also wrote his book, 'Lying Down with the Lions: A Public Life from the Streets of Oakland to the Halls of Power.' At this point in the interview, he reflects upon the diversity of the San Francisco Bay Area, and talks about the danger of political cynicism. Dellums also shares his advice for young people, and describes the benefits of social media as a political organizing tool. In 2005, Dellums was called on to run for mayor of Oakland, California. Despite his initial reservations, he agreed, and was elected in 2006. During his term as mayor, Dellums continued his advocacy for AIDS education on a local scale.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_003_014, TRT: 14:30:09 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums agreed to run for mayor of Oakland, California in 2005, after being encouraged by his constituents. As mayor, he focused on public safety; worked to reduce recidivism; and implemented a crime reduction strategy that prioritized prevention, intervention, enforcement and sustainability. During Dellums' term in office, homicide reduced by 50 percent. He also initiated community policing in Oakland neighborhoods in order to improve relationships between police and community members. Dellums took a strong stance on gun control in the city, which was inspired in part by the murder of his nephew years earlier. In 2009, as President Barack Obama's administration

prepared the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Dellums advocated for Oakland to become a test case for the stimulus strategy. He worked closely with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to find solutions for the financial recession in Oakland that could be mimicked elsewhere in the country.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_003_015, TRT: 15:30:05 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums sought to treat his opponents in the U.S. Congress with respect, and successfully cultivated relationships across political lines. He admired and learned from many senators during this time, including Barney Frank and many members of the Congressional Black Caucus. After thirteen terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Dellums served as mayor of Oakland, California from 2007 until 2011. During his tenure, Dellums successfully lowered the unemployment rates, with over five thousand jobs produced in the city at a time when many cities in the San Francisco Bay Area were losing job opportunities. He focused his mayoral priorities on improving public safety and public health. Dellums also talks about the murder of Oakland journalist Chauncey Bailey, Jr. in 2007. After his retirement from public service, Dellums worked as a consultant. At this point in the interview, he reflects upon his time in office and his legislative legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ronald Dellums, Section A2003_042_003_016, TRT: 16:07:56 ?

The Honorable Ronald Dellums raised five children; Pam Dellums, Brandy Dellums, Erik Dellums and Piper Dellums. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life.