

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Michael Thurmond

PERSON

Thurmond, Michael L.

Alternative Names: The Honorable Michael Thurmond;

Life Dates: January 5, 1953-

Place of Birth: Athens, Georgia, USA

Work: Decatur, GA

Occupations: State Labor Commissioner

Biographical Note

Georgia Labor Commissioner and noted historian Michael L. Thurmond was born in Athens, Georgia, on January 5, 1953, the youngest of the nine children of Sidney and Vanilla Thurmond. For eleven years Thurmond attended all-black schools, graduating from consolidated Clarke Senior High School in 1971 as co-president of the student council and holder of the 100-yard dash record. At Paine College Thurmond started a student paper, was class president, and graduated cum laude with his B.A. degree in philosophy and religion in 1975; he later graduated from the University of South Carolina Law School.

In the summer of 1975, Thurmond helped start the black Athens Voice newspaper and upon graduation from law school in 1978, published *A Story Untold: Black Men and Women in Athens History*. Thurmond returned to Athens to practice law and took an active role in civic affairs; in 1986, he became the first African American to be elected to the Georgia General Assembly from Clarke County since the time of Reconstruction. In 1994, Governor Zell Miller selected Thurmond to head Georgia's transition from welfare to work. Thurmond became a distinguished practitioner and lecturer at the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Thurmond became the first African American elected Georgia State Labor Commissioner in 1998; in this role he oversaw some four thousand employees while serving 90,000 families.

Thurmond chaired the Martin Luther King, Jr., Georgia State Holiday Commission, and served on the board of curators of the Georgia Historical Society. Thurmond published a second book entitled, *Freedom: An African American History of Georgia*. Thurmond and his wife Zola raised a daughter, Mikaya.

Related Entries

Clarke Central High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Charles H. Lyons Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

North Athens Elementary [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of South Carolina School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Paine College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Georgia General Assembly [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1992 to 1996]

Representative

Georgia's Welfare-to-Work Initiative [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1994 to 1997]

Head

University of Georgia. Carl Vinson Institute of Government [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1997 to 1997]

State of Georgia [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1998 to ?]

Labor Commissioner