

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Willie L. Brown

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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>	Brown, Willie L. (Willie Lewis), Jr., 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 14, 2015 and December 19, 2015
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2015
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:21:58).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mayor and state assemblyman The Honorable Willie L. Brown (1934 - ) represented San Francisco in the California State Assembly from 1964 to 1995 and served as Mayor of San Francisco from 1996 to 2004. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 2015 and December 19, 2015, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2015_008
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Political leader The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Jr. was born on March 20, 1934 in Mineola, Texas to Minnie Collins Boyd and Willie Lewis Brown, Sr. He graduated from Mineola Colored High School in 1951. In 1955, he received his B.A. degree in political science from San Francisco State University, followed by a J.D. degree in 1958 from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brown operated his own general law practice in San Francisco. In 1960, he led a sit-in to protest housing discrimination; and in 1964 he defended political activist Mario Savio, who was arrested for civil disobedience. Brown was elected to the California State Assembly in 1964 on his second run, and he would remain there to represent San Francisco until 1995. In 1969, he was made the Democratic Whip; and in 1980, he was elected Speaker of the Assembly. He also spoke at the 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami, Florida. After Californians passed a 1990 ballot initiative instituting term limits for state elected officials, Brown was “termed out” of office in 1995. That year, he ran for the office of Mayor of San Francisco and easily defeated incumbent Frank Jordan. He served as mayor from 1996 until 2004, overseeing several development projects and mediating two public transit worker strikes.

After retiring from public office in 2004, Brown continued to dedicate his time to community service. In 2008, he established the Willie L. Brown, Jr. Institute on Politics and Public Service, a nonpartisan non-profit organization at San Francisco State University dedicated to training future municipal administrators. Brown has Honorary Doctorate of Law degrees from seventeen institutions, including San Francisco State University, Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, and Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio; as well as a Doctorate of Science degree from the California College of Podiatric Medicine. He was a Fellow of Crown College at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 2006, Brown co-hosted a morning radio show with comedian Will Durst, and in 2008 he published his autobiography, *Basic Brown: My Life and Our Times*.

In 1958, Brown married Blanche Vitero, with whom he has three children: Susan, Robin, and Michael. He also has four grandchildren and a daughter, Sydney Brown, by Carolyn Carpeneti. Brown and Vitero separated in 1976 but remain married.

Willie L. Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 14, 2015.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown was conducted by Belva Davis on December 14, 2015 and December 19, 2015, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Mayor and state assemblyman The Honorable Willie L. Brown (1934 - ) represented San Francisco in the California State Assembly from 1964 to 1995 and served as Mayor of San Francisco from 1996 to 2004.

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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:

Brown, Willie L. (Willie Lewis), Jr., 1934-

Davis, Belva (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Willie L. (Willie Lewis), Jr., 1934---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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California. Legislature. Assembly

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San Francisco (Calif.)

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# Occupations:

State Assemblyman

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Mayor

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Willie L. Brown, December 14, 2015 and December 19, 2015. 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 The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_001\_001, TRT: 1:32:15 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown was born on March 20, 1934 in Mineola, Texas to Minnie Collins Boyd and Willie L. Brown, Sr. His maternal grandmother, Anna Lee Nolan Collins, was a nightclub owner and bootlegger in Mineola, where his mother attended Mineola Colored High School until the tenth grade. Brown's father also lived in Mineola, where he worked as Pullman porter. As a young child, Brown had little contact with his father. Brown and his five siblings stayed with their maternal grandmother, while their mother worked in Dallas, Texas as a housekeeper. After graduating from Addie E. McFarland High School in 1951, he enrolled at Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. Due to conflicts with the administration, he left in his first semester. Brown then worked at the Southern Methodist University library in Dallas for a month before moving to San Francisco, California. There, he enrolled at San Francisco State College, and attended church services at Jones Memorial United Methodist Church.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:39 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown moved to San Francisco, California in 1951, where he lived with his uncle Itsie Collins. As a member of Jones Memorial United Methodist Church, Brown became acquainted with the church's head pastor, Hamilton Boswell, and lawyers Joseph Kennedy and H. LeRoy Cannon, who were also members. With the support of professor Duncan Gillies, Brown enrolled at San Francisco State College. During this time, he participated in the Young Democrats and the NAACP, and joined the U.S. Air Force ROTC, where he met politician John Burton. Through his organizing activities, Brown developed an alliance with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and supported the campaign of the Progressive Party's presidential candidate, Vincent Hallinan. In 1955, Brown was admitted to the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. At this time, he worked with attorney George Moscone, and civil rights leaders Terry Francois, Carlton Benjamin Goodlett and Joseph B. Williams.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:14 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown attended University of California, Hastings College of the Law, where he worked as a teaching assistant under an older tort professor. After graduating, he established an office at the law firm of NAACP leader Terry Francois. Brown first worked with black churches, and then as a criminal defense attorney. In 1964, he ran against incumbent Edward M. Gaffney in the California State Assembly elections, and won with help from his coalition of supporters including politician Phillip Burton, black church leaders and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. During his first term, Brown challenged the leadership of Speaker of the California State Assembly Jesse M. Unruh. He also supported Fannie Lou Hammer's efforts to represent the State of Mississippi at the 1964 Democratic Convention. Later, Brown served on the credentials committee of the 1968 Democratic National Convention, and recommended Julian Bond as the delegate for Georgia over segregationist Lester Maddox.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_001\_004, TRT: 4:13:04 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown was elected to the California State Assembly in 1974. During this time, many African Americans assumed political roles like Congressman Julian Bond, Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes, Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher and Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. Brown chaired the California State Assembly Ways and Means Committee, and worked closely with then-governor Ronald Wilson Reagan to develop the state budget. He also worked to decriminalize homosexuality and reform marijuana laws. In 1974, Brown ran for Speaker of the California State Assembly but lost to Leo T. McCarthy, who then ostracized him. In 1979, Brown served as the chairman of the Committee on Revenue and Taxation, where he was instrumental in implementing Proposition 13. Discontent with McCarthy's leadership, the Democratic Party of the California legislature became divided between McCarthy and Howard Berman during the 1980 speaker election. Brown appealed to the Republican Party and liberal Democrats to clinch the victory in 1981.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_002\_005, TRT: 5:29:01 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown served as Speaker of the California State Assembly from 1981 to 1995, longer than any other speaker. Taking what he learned from observing the leadership styles of the three previous speakers, Jesse M. Unruh, Leo T. McCarthy and Bob Moretti, Brown sought to establish a sustainable bipartisan relationship in the legislature. He was admired by both political parties for his fairness and dedication. During his fifteen year tenure, Brown faced challenges from his fellow members, most notably the Gang of Five, who were a group of young Democratic representatives including Gary Condit and Rusty Areias. In 1990, Republican legislators endorsed a term limit restriction for state legislators in order to unseat Brown. When state senator David Roberti neglected to mail President Ronald Reagan's letter of opposition to voters, Brown lost the support needed to defeat the proposal. As a result, Brown left the California State Assembly as he unable to run for reelection in 1995.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_002\_006, TRT: 6:34:11 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown helped initiate early large-scale research on AIDS in the mid-1980s through the University of California system. He continued to advocate for awareness on the issue throughout his political career. Brown was reluctant to run for mayor of San Francisco, California due to the controversies surrounding the local government including the Jim Jones incident and the assassinations of George Moscone and Harvey Milk in 1978. Ultimately, Brown decided to join the mayoral race, and was elected in 1995. At first, he struggled to adjust to the different demands and constraints of the office. Brown then organized a strategic planning summit, where he met with economist Milton Friedman, former Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. As mayor, Brown worked on various projects, including the construction of AT&T Park, and repairing earthquake damaged buildings like City Hall and the War Memorial Opera House. He also talks about journalist Herb Caen.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Willie L. Brown, Section A2015\_008\_002\_007, TRT: 7:33:34 ?

The Honorable Willie L. Brown served as mayor of San Francisco, California from 1996 to 2004, during which time he commemorated the contributions of

minority leaders like Carlton Benjamin Goodlett by dedicating the street address of City Hall in his name. Through mitigation requirements for new developments, he facilitated the construction of the Museum of the African Diaspora, the Contemporary Jewish Museum and the Mexican Museum. Brown was married to Blanche Vitero Brown, with whom he had three children; Susan Brown, Robin Brown Friedel and Michael Brown. With his longtime girlfriend, Carolyn Carpeneti, he had one daughter, Sydney Brown. Brown established the Willie L. Brown, Jr. Fellowship Program and Willie L. Brown, Jr. Institute on Politics and Public Service; and in 2013, Alice A. Huffman organized the renaming of the western span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in his honor. At this point, Brown reflects upon his fashion interests, his hopes for the African American community and his legacy.