

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Doris Bunte

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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>	Bunte, Doris, 1933-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 19, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:59:28).
<b>Abstract:</b>	State representative and city official Doris Bunte (1933 - 2021) was the first African American elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where she served for twelve years. She was also the director of the Boston Housing Authority for seven years. Bunte was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 19, 2016, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_105
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

State representative and city official Doris Bunte was born on July 2, 1933 in New York City to Evelyn Johnson Brown and Herbert Brown. She attended Food Trades Vocational High School, but left before receiving her diploma. In 1953, she moved to Boston, Massachusetts with her three children, and earned her G.E.D. in 1968. Bunte enrolled in Harvard University in 1978, where she earned a certificate in environmental studies from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and her M.A. degree in education in 1982.

Upon her arrival in Boston, Bunte joined the Barcolene Company. She moved to the Orchard Park Housing Projects, where she joined the maintenance management council and co-founded the Boston Public Housing Tenants Policy Council. In 1969, Bunte was nominated to the Boston Housing Authority board, making her the first public housing tenant to serve. She was dismissed from the Boston Housing Authority board in 1971 by Mayor Kevin H. White, but was reinstated by the Massachusetts Supreme Court. In 1973, she was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, becoming the first African American woman to serve in the Massachusetts legislature. There, Bunte helped found the Massachusetts Legislative Black Caucus and the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators. After twelve years as a representative, she left the Massachusetts legislature to become the director of the Boston Housing Authority, where she headed public housing integration efforts. Bunte left the Boston Housing Authority in 1992, and began working for the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University and the Boston University School of Public Health, where she continued tenant-focused activist work. Bunte retired in 2010.

She held positions on the National Rent Board and in the National Tenants Organization. She also served on the Critical Minority Affairs Committee and the National Association of Housing and Development, as well as the Citizens Housing and Planning Association. Bunte received recognition for her contributions, including being featured in a mural at the historic Alvah Kittredge House and in an exhibit called “Portraits in Black: Gaining

Ground, Holding Office” in the Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket in 2004.

Doris Bunte was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 19, 2016.

Bunte passed away on February 15, 2021.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 19, 2016, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. State representative and city official Doris Bunte (1933 - 2021) was the first African American elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, where she served for twelve years. She was also the director of the Boston Housing Authority for seven years.

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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:

Bunte, Doris, 1933-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bunte, Doris, 1933- --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:

State Representative

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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 Doris Bunte, October 19, 2016. 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 Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_001,

TRT: 1:28:40 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte was born on July 2, 1933 in New York City to Evelyn Johnson Brown and Herbert Brown. Her mother attended the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, and earned a nursing degree from a college in Atlanta, Georgia. Bunte's father was a U.S. Merchant Marine, and died before Bunte was born. Bunte's mother raised Bunte and her siblings on the East Side of Manhattan. She worked as a nurse, and cleaned medical offices on the weekends. She also belonged to the New Deal Democratic Club, and worked on programs with Councilman Vito Marcantonio and Manhattan Borough President Hulan Jack. She later became the first black woman to run a voting district in New York City. Bunte was born with polio, and was unable to walk until the age of four years old. As a teenager, she sang with her family on Friday nights, and spent the rest of the weekend caring for her maternal grandmother, Ella Murray Johnson, whose legs were amputated due to diabetes.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_002,  
TRT: 2:29:20 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte studied at Food Trades Vocational High School in New York City. She planned to become a caterer, but left school after the birth of her first child. At nineteen years old, Bunte moved to Boston, Massachusetts. She placed her sons in foster care, and left money to help her mother, Evelyn Johnson Brown, care for her daughter. In Boston, Bunte initially worked in factories, and then joined a cleaning service, but quit when her clients became abusive. Then, Bunte taught herself to type on a drawn keyboard, and secured a position at the Barcolene Company. The steady employment allowed her to reunite with her children, and Bunte's mother joined her household in Boston as well. Bunte began applying for public housing, and after two years of rejections, she moved her family into the Orchard Park Housing Projects in Roxbury. Bunte and her mother also volunteered at the Hattie B. Cooper Community Center, where her mother became the chairperson of the senior organization.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_003,  
TRT: 3:25:58 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte lived in the Orchard Park Housing Projects in Boston, Massachusetts in the 1960s. During that time, Ellis Ash became the head of Boston Housing Authority (BHA), and began organizing the city's public housing tenants. Bunte joined the maintenance management council at Orchard Park, and was later named chairperson of the development. Bunte also cofounded the Boston Public Housing Tenants Policy Council, which received Ash's invitation to participate in the BHA's public meetings. In 1968, Bunte completed her GED diploma to provide an example for her daughter, who wanted to drop out of high school. Around this time, Bunte joined the board of the BHA, where she was the first black tenant to serve. After Bunte fired the BHA executive director, Mayor Kevin White attempted to oust her, but she was reinstated by the state supreme court. In 1973, Bunte was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_004,  
TRT: 4:29:13 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte joined the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1972. She succeeded Representative Frank Holgate, and served alongside Representative Royal L. Bolling. During her first year, Bunte cofounded the Massachusetts Legislative Black Caucus. At the time, there were no African Americans in the Massachusetts Senate due to gerrymandered districts. In

response, the black caucus spearheaded legislation to form the first majority-black senate district. The speaker of the legislature attempted to change the bill, but the black caucus was supported by Governor Francis Sargent, who vetoed the altered redistricting plans until a majority-black district was included. In 1974, the City of Boston implemented a busing program to desegregate the public schools. Bunte organized a meeting for concerned African American parents, and also attended meetings held in white communities. In 1975, Bunte successfully founded the Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators after three years of failed attempts.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_005, TRT: 5:32:48 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives for twelve years. During this time, she earned a certificate in environmental studies from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, and petitioned W. Arthur Garrity, Jr. to prevent the closure of James W. Hennigan Magnet Elementary School in Boston, Massachusetts. She also completed credits at the Boston University Metropolitan College. With the scores from these courses and the Miller Analogies Test, Bunte was admitted to the Harvard Graduate School of Education without an undergraduate degree. She received her master's degree in education in 1982. In 1985, Bunte was appointed as the director of the Boston Housing Authority by Mayor Raymond Flynn. In that role, she focused on maintaining the city's public housing facilities. She was later sued by the NAACP and critics of Mayor Flynn for allowing the housing projects to remain segregated. At this point, Bunte talks about how she was represented in the local media.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Doris Bunte, Section A2016\_105\_001\_006, TRT: 6:33:29 ?

The Honorable Doris Bunte retired from the Boston Housing Authority in 1992. After a brief period of unemployment, she was hired by David Lapchick at Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society in Boston, Massachusetts. There, she developed Project Teamwork, a bullying prevention program for public school students taught by professional athletes. She also created a program to prevent domestic abuse among athletes. Bunte went on to form the Community Committee for Health Promotion at Boston University, which created a program called Knowledge is Power to increase access to healthcare resources in the African American community. Bunte officially retired from public life in 2010, but she continued to serve as an advocate for public housing tenants. At this point, Bunte describes her concerns for public housing programs, which were underfunded. She reflects upon her life and legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.