

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with James R. Barrett

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Historians Speak Oral History project

Interview # HIS-A-L-2020-042

James R. Barrett, Professor of History Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, leading U.S. social, cultural, labor and race/ethnicity historian, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's Historians Speak Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Jul 14, 15 & 17, 2020

Location: Telephonic interview, with James Barrett at his Champaign, Illinois home

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Robert D. Sampson, Ph.D., ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

**Transcript
being processed**

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:23 + 2:27 + 2:34 / 2.38 + 2.45 + 2.57 = 7.4 hrs

Session 1: Childhood, education and the 1958 Our Lady of Angels School fire

Session 2: Barrett meets wife, graduate studies and approach to history & his books.

Session 3: Barrett's working class background and teaching history at U of IL

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on (3/12/2021).

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in
Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

James Barrett, *Historians Speak-Illinois*, HIS-A-L-2020-042

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: James R. Barrett was born on June 14, 1950 in Chicago, Illinois. He was raised in Chicago and attended St. Patrick High School, then graduated from Main South High School in Park Ridge, Illinois in 1968. He received an undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1972, an MA in social history from the University of Warwick in Coventry, England, and a Ph.D. in history in 1981 from the University of Pittsburgh. In 1984 he began his career teaching U.S. history, social history and African American studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, retiring in 2014.

Dr. Barrett was working at the time of this interviews on a new history of Chicago, one examining the interplay of race, ethnicity, class and culture in the development of the metropolis, and how its issues resonated with similar issues at the national level. With his first major journal article, followed by his first book, *Work and Community in "The Jungle:" Chicago's Packing House Workers, 1884-1922*, Professor Barrett pioneered the "bottom up" approach to American history, examining the lives of everyday working people and their impact on larger historical trends. This interest continued through four subsequent books, including *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multi-Ethnic City*. James's wife Jenny Barrett devoted significant time to social activism during her career in information technology at UIUC and as a collaborator on the Chicago project.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Labor history, Chicago history; Our Lady of Angels School Fire of 1958; race relations in Chicago; U.S. Communist Party; socialism in America; Chicago packing house workers; Irish immigration; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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