

The Honorable William Lacy Clay Sr.
U.S. Representative of Missouri (1969–2001)

The Long Struggle for Representation: Oral Histories of African Americans in Congress

Early Years in St. Louis

Representative Clay Sr. reflects on the discrimination he faced during his childhood in St. Louis.
Interview recorded September 10, 2019

CLAY: I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. Everybody had their own tenants, tenement houses, only ours had outdoor toilets. We had Italians. They lived in one tenement. And we had the Irish in another, and the Polish in a fourth, so that was a general kind of neighborhood. The playground across the street from where we lived, it was really comical. It was half white and half Black. They had a set of swings for the Blacks, set of swings for the whites, a swimming pool for the whites, a wading pool for the Blacks. They had two softball diamonds, two—what do you call them? The—

WASNIEWSKI: Volleyball?

CLAY: Volleyball. They had two horseshoe pits. That was, now the playground would close at 5:00, so after 5 we all played together. I mean, I don't know why between 9 and 5 we couldn't play together. So that's, that was the kind of neighborhood that I grew up in.