

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lani Guinier

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Guinier, Lani
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lani Guinier,
Dates:	December 2, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:18:10).
Abstract:	Law professor and civil rights lawyer Lani Guinier (1950 - 2022) is the first African American woman to become a tenured professor at Harvard University. Guinier has spearheaded efforts to educate the public about race and gender discrimination in both politics and the law. Guinier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2004, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_245
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lani Guinier was born on April 19, 1950, in New York City. Her father, Ewart, was a lawyer, union organizer, and real estate agent, and her mother, Eugenia, was a public school teacher. In the late 1960s, Guinier attended Harvard University and was one of the students who petitioned for the establishment of an African American studies program there, which was later headed by her father. In 1971, she graduated from Harvard's Radcliffe College. In 1974, Guinier graduated from Yale Law School, where former President Bill Clinton was one of her classmates.

During the 1970s, she was head of the voting rights project for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. In this position, she helped win major victories in voting rights cases in Alabama and other southern states. In 1998, when Guinier joined the Harvard Law School faculty, she became the first African American woman tenured professor in the law school's history.

Guinier came to public attention in 1993 when President Clinton nominated her to be the first black woman to head the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. She had been a civil rights attorney for more than ten years and had served in the Civil Rights Division during the Carter Administration as special assistant to then Assistant Attorney General Drew S. Days. Immediately after her name was put forward in 1993, conservatives attacked Guinier's views on democracy and voting, driving Clinton to abruptly withdraw her nomination without a confirmation hearing. That experience led Guinier to use her subsequent public platform to speak out on issues of race, gender and democratic decision-making and to call for candid public discourse on these issues.

She wrote and published a series of books that unveiled her views and commitment to social justice and political participation in America and finished a memoir on the controversy she was immersed in, exploring the politics surrounding the derailment of her Justice Department nomination, and assessing the progress and potential of the Civil Rights Movement. *Lift Every Voice: Turning a Civil Rights Setback into a New Vision of Social Justice* was

published in April 2004. Her books revived a national discussion about the meaning of democracy.

Guinier has received numerous awards, including the 1995 Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award from the American Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession, the Rosa Parks Award from the American Association for Affirmative Action, the Harvey Levin Teaching Award and the 2002 Sacks-Freund Teaching Award from Harvard Law School.

Lani Guinier was married to Nolan Bowie, and they are the parents of a son, Nikolas.

Guinier passed away on January 7, 2022.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lani Guinier was conducted by Robert Hayden on December 2, 2004, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Law professor and civil rights lawyer Lani Guinier (1950 - 2022) is the first African American woman to become a tenured professor at Harvard University. Guinier has spearheaded efforts to educate the public about race and gender discrimination in both politics and the law.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Guinier, Lani

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Guinier, Lani--Interviews

African American women lawyers--Interviews

Harvard University--Faculty--Interviews

Racially mixed people--Interviews

African Americans--Genealogy

Children of immigrants--United States

Fathers

Mothers

Queens (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs

Holidays (New York, N.Y.)

Education--New York (State)--New York

Martha's Vineyard (Mass.)

Vacations--Massachusetts--Cape Cod

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Law Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Lani Guinier, December 2, 2004. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Lani Guinier, Section A2004_245_001_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Noted legal scholar Lani Guinier shares stories of her parents' divergent backgrounds. Her father, a Jamaican born in Panama, faced nearly insurmountable hurdles to achieve an education. He eventually graduated from City College of New York, and received a master's degree from Columbia University and a law degree from New York University. Lani Guinier is more private about her mother's information due to concerns of identity theft. She does mention that her mother was born in Poland and emigrated to the United States as a young girl. Lani Guinier details her father's professional accomplishments and how he served as a role model for her future achievements, including graduating from the university where he encountered so much hostility.

African American women lawyers--Interviews.

Harvard University--Faculty--Interviews.

Racially mixed people--Interviews.

African Americans--Genealogy.

Children of immigrants--United States.

Fathers.

Mothers.

Queens (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Holidays (New York, N.Y.).

Education--New York (State)--New York.

Martha's Vineyard (Mass.).

Vacations--Massachusetts--Cape Cod.

Video Oral History Interview with Lani Guinier, Section A2004_245_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Lani Guinier describes the Queens, New York neighborhood of her youth. She recalls youthful games like hot beans and butter, punch ball and others. Guinier also details her early childhood education and several anecdotes from that period. The segment closes with her recollections of holidays spent with her grandmother in Brooklyn.

Video Oral History Interview with Lani Guinier, Section A2004_245_001_003, TRT: 0:19:40 ?

Lani Guinier recalls her years in junior high and high school in Queens, New York. She describes a borough-wide chorus to which she belonged, some favorite teachers and a disappointing thirteen vote loss for student council. Guinier also reminisces about her childhood vacations in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts.