

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Cardiss Collins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Collins, Cardiss, 1931-2013
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins,
Dates:	June 28, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:23:54).
Abstract:	U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Cardiss Collins (1931 - 2013) served for eleven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she helped pass laws that fought discrimination, enforced gender equity, and reformed child care. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 28, 2010, in Alexandria, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_059
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former U.S. Congresswoman of Illinois's 7th district Cardiss Collins was born on September 24, 1931, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Finley and Rosia Mae Cardiss Robertson. When she was ten years old, she moved with her family to Detroit, Michigan, where she attended the Detroit High School of Commerce. After high school, Collins moved to Chicago, Illinois to find a job. She worked as a stenographer with the Illinois Department of Labor while simultaneously attending Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where she earned her B.S. degree in accounting. She was promoted to secretary, then accountant at the Illinois Department of Revenue before becoming the revenue auditor. In 1958, Collins married George W. Collins, and in 1959, their son, Kevin, was born. Collins served as committeewoman of the Twenty-fourth Ward Regular Democratic Organization, where she gained her first political experience. She also participated in her husband's campaigns for alderman, committeeman and U.S. Representative.

Tragically, on December 8, 1972, George W. Collins died in a plane crash. Six months later, Collins was elected to Congress in the June 5, 1973 special election to replace her husband. In 1978, she became the first African American and first woman to chair the Manpower and Housing subcommittee of the House Government Operations Committee and to be named Democratic whip-at-large in the House. One year later, she was elected president of the Congressional Black Caucus. From 1983 to 1991, she served as chair of the Government Activities and Transportation (GAT) Subcommittee, where she helped pass laws that controlled the transport of toxic materials and helped provide more secure air travel. She also introduced the Non-Discrimination in Advertising Act, which denied federal tax write-offs to major advertising firms that ignored black-owned communications media, both print and broadcast. In 1990, she wrote a law that expanded Medicare coverage for screening mammography for millions of elderly and disabled women, and in 1991, she was named chairwoman of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness. In Congress, she focused on establishing universal health insurance, providing for gender equity in college sports, and reforming federal child care facilities. In 1993, she authored the Child Safety Protection Act, which requires warning labels

on dangerous toys and federal safety standards for bicycle helmets. In 1996, Collins chose to retire and did not run for re-election.

The recipient of honorary degrees from Barber-Scotia College, Spelman College, and Winston-Salem State University, Collins was elected to the Black Women's Hall of Fame in 1982. In 1990, the Congressional Black Caucus presented Collins with the William L. Dawson Award for Legislative Development, and in 1991, she was honored with an American Black Achievement Award for government service. The American Advertising Foundation established the Cardiss Collins Scholarship for Diversity in Advertising at the University of Illinois in 1996, which provides a full-tuition scholarship to a freshman University of Illinois student in advertising.

Collins passed away on February 3, 2013 at the age of 81.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 28, 2010, in Alexandria, Virginia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. U.S. congresswoman The Honorable Cardiss Collins (1931 - 2013) served for eleven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she helped pass laws that fought discrimination, enforced gender equity, and reformed child care.

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:

Collins, Cardiss, 1931-2013

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Collins, Cardiss, 1931-2013 --Interviews

African American politicians--Illinois--Interviews

African American legislators--United States--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

U.S. House of Representatives

Occupations:

U.S. Congresswoman

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Cardiss Collins, June 28, 2010. 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 The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_001, TRT: 0:28:16 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins was born on September 24, 1931 in St. Louis, Missouri to Rosia Robertson and Finley Robertson. Her maternal great-grandfather, Erastus White, was a freed slave who amassed land in Tennessee, later known as Whiteville. Collins' maternal grandmother moved to Cairo, Illinois and Collins' mother was sent to live in St. Louis, Missouri with her Aunt Birdie White Johnson and Uncle Beryl Johnson. Collins' father was born in Whiteville to teacher Dora Robertson and farmer Artie Robertson, who were unrelated to Collins' maternal family. As a young man in search of better employment opportunities, Collins' father moved to St. Louis, where he met and married Collins' mother. However, they separated shortly after Collins's birth. She lived with her mother in the attic of a former funeral home, and was cared for by a neighbor while her mother worked. Collins often spent summers with her grandmother in the strictly segregated Cairo.

Segregation--Illinois--Cairo.

Segregation--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Religion.

Second Baptist Church (Detroit, Mich.).

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_002, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins attended Banneker Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri until 1939 when she and her mother, Rosia Robertson, moved to Detroit, Michigan. There, she enrolled at Bishop Elementary School and often delivered her mother's payments to Charles Diggs, Sr.'s insurance company in the black business district. She attended Sidney D. Miller High School for one year before transferring to High School of Commerce in hopes of becoming a stenographer. It had a well-integrated student body, although it only employed white teachers. In her free time, Collins joined a Billy Eckstine fan club, and attended live shows downtown. Upon graduating, she intended to enroll at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but could not afford the tuition. She then moved to Chicago, Illinois to live with her maternal grandmother, Emma White Robertson, and soon began working for the state as a stenographer. Collins also took night classes at Northwestern University; and met and married George Collins.

Detroit (Mich.)--Social conditions.

African American press.

Wayne State University.

African Americans--Education--Michigan--Detroit.

World War, 1939-1945.

Civil service--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:48 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins was an accountant at the Illinois Department of Revenue when she married George Collins, and moved to Chicago's West Side. His uncle employed him as a precinct worker, and he was later recruited by Alderman Benjamin Lewis as a precinct captain for the 24th Ward. After Lewis' murder, Collins' husband assumed his duties. He served the 24th Ward during Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s stay in Chicago and acknowledged the need for improving civil rights in the city. The riots following King's assassination prevented Collins from retrieving her son from her mother's house, and she was urged by her husband to stay inside. As alderman, Collins' husband worked to contain the riots and to address unemployment on the West Side. In 1969, Illinois 6th District Representative Daniel J. Ronan passed away, and Collins' husband was elected to his seat in the U.S. Congress. He served there until his death in 1972, when Mayor Richard J. Daley asked Collins to finish her husband's term.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

African Americans--Illinois--Chicago.

Riots--Illinois--Chicago--20th century.

Chicago (Ill.)--Politics and government.

Chicago (Ill.)--Race relations.

Collins, George Washington, 1925-1972.

Aircraft accidents.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_004,
TRT: 0:29:58 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins' husband, George Collins, died tragically in a plane crash in 1972. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley urged Collins to fill her husband's vacant congressional seat, and she was further encouraged by her mother, Rosia Robertson, and Reverend Dr. Shelvin Jerome Hall. Collins ran a successful campaign, and was elected to represent Illinois' 6th Congressional District in 1973. She joined the Congressional Black Caucus, which her husband had helped found, and advocated for more federal contracts to black-owned businesses. She focused on issues of employment, housing, education and health, and served on the U.S. House Committee on Public Works. Collins played an instrumental role in passing the Title IX regulations, which enforced gender equality in athletics. She also authored legislation to give Medicare recipients access to mammograms. During her time in Congress, Collins worked alongside African American politicians like Gus Savage, Ralph Metcalfe and Harold Washington.

Congressional Black Caucus.

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Savage, Gus.

United States. Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX.

Political campaigns--Illinois.

Political leadership.

United States--Politics and government.

Husbands--Death.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_005,
TRT: 0:17:31 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins worked alongside Shirley Chisholm, Yvette Brathwaite Burke and Maxine Waters during her tenure in the U.S. Congress. She worked well with President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter, Jr., although she was often impeded by his advisory staff. Collins spoke with President William Jefferson “Bill” Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton frequently during their time in the White House, and established a successful relationship with the Clinton administration staff. She retired from Congress in 1997, and was succeeded by Danny K. Davis. He sought to have a post office named in her honor in downtown Chicago, Illinois. Collins talks about the presidency of Barack Obama and her role as chair emeritus of the Congressional Black Caucus. She also shares her potential plans to write an autobiography, and describes how she would like to be remembered. Collins concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life and legacy.

United States--Politics and government.

Executive-legislative relations—United States.

Thomas, Clarence, 1948-.

Obama, Barack.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_006,
TRT: 0:09:15 ?

The Honorable Cardiss Collins narrates her photographs.