

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joanne Berger-Sweeney

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Berger-Sweeney, Joanne
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney,
Dates:	April 23, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:29:45).
Abstract:	University president and neurobiologist Joanne Berger-Sweeney (1958 -) became the twenty-second president of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2014. Berger-Sweeney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2013, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_008
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

University president and neurobiologist Joanne Berger-Sweeney was born on September 21, 1958, in Los Angeles, California, to Arminta Parks and Paul Sweeney. She received her B.A. degree in psychobiology in 1979 from Wellesley College, in Wellesley, Massachusetts, her M.P.H. degree in environmental health sciences in 1981 from the University of California, Berkeley, and her Ph.D. degree in neurotoxicology in 1989 from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, in Baltimore, Maryland.

After graduating from Wellesley College, Berger-Sweeney worked for the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and as a sanitary engineering consultant at the California Indian Legal Services and Project Leader at the California State Department of Health. After receiving her master's degree, she became an environmental scientist at Engineering Science, Inc., and an assistant resident manager at the Hackerman-Patz House for Oncology Patients and Families at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. Berger-Sweeney completed her postdoctoral training at the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM in Paris, France. In 1991, Berger-Sweeney was hired at her alma mater as the Allene Lummis Russell Professor in Neuroscience and was promoted to associate dean in 2004. From 1995 to 2004, Berger-Sweeney served as a lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. In 2010, she was appointed dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University, in Medford, Massachusetts, where she also worked as a professor of biology. In 2014, Berger-Sweeney became president of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2014, where she also serves as a professor of neuroscience.

Berger-Sweeney has served on the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives board, the Behavioral Neuroscience Review Panel of the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Study Section panel, and the editorial board of *Behavioral Neuroscience*. Berger-Sweeney also has served as treasurer for the Society for Neuroscience and director of the Society for Neuroscience's Minority Neuroscience Fellowship Program. Berger-Sweeney currently serves on the board of trustees of the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, the Henry Luce

Foundation, and the Institute of International Education.

Berger-Sweeney's honors include being named a Fellow by the Faculty for Undergraduate Neuroscience and receiving a Lifetime Mentoring Achievement Award from the Society for Neuroscience and a National Science Foundation Young Investigator Award. She was elected as Fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2012 and a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences in 2018. Berger-Sweeney was a recipient of the 2016 Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the Connecticut NAACP.

Berger-Sweeney and her husband, Urs V. Berger, live in Hartford, Connecticut. They have two children, Clara and Tommy.

Joanne Berger-Sweeney was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 23, 2013, and _____.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 23, 2013, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. University president and neurobiologist Joanne Berger-Sweeney (1958 -) became the twenty-second president of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 2014.

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:

Berger-Sweeney, Joanne

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Berger-Sweeney, Joanne--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Trinity College (Hartford, Conn.)

Trinity College (Hartford, Conn.)

Occupations:

University President

Neurobiologist

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers|ScienceMakers

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 Joanne Berger-Sweeney, April 23, 2013. 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 Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_001, TRT: 1:29:19 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney talks about her family background. Her mother, Arminta Odessa Parks, was born in June of 1926 in Atlanta, Georgia. She grew up around influential African American civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois. After earning her B.A. degree from Clark Atlanta University, she received a Master's degree in sociology from Atlanta University. Berger-Sweeney's father, Paul Wesley Sweeney, Sr., was born in June of 1921 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and later grew up in Harlem, New York. His family name, Sweeney, derives from an Irish ancestor, who was an abolitionist lawyer that married a slave. Her father served in the Navy and attended Clark Atlanta University, where he met his wife, Arminta Odessa Parks, and played varsity basketball. He then graduated as salutatorian from Howard University Law School and moved the family to Los Angeles, California, where Berger-Sweeney was born.

African American families.

African American parents--Education.

African American universities and colleges--Alumni and alumnae.

Clark Atlanta University.

Lawyers--Family relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_002, TRT: 2:29:35 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney's father moved the family to Los Angeles, California after earning his J.D. degree from Howard University Law School. He worked at the Urban League there before starting his own private law practice. Her mother worked at the Angeles Girl Scout Council. Berger-Sweeney talks about her memories growing up in Los Angeles. She lived in the Los Angeles flatlands, Baldwin Hills and Inglewood. Her earliest childhood memory is of her falling off of her mother's white Ford Falcon and losing her two front teeth. Some of her other childhood memories include camping with her family, her father driving to New York in his black Cadillac during the L.A. Watts Riots, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preaching at her church, Holman Methodist Church, and being raised during the Civil Rights era. She talks about her parents, her brothers, the transformation of Inglewood and her experience at Virginia Rhode Elementary School.

African American families--California--Los Angeles.

National Urban League--People.

Childhood and youth--California--Los Angeles.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Public appearances--California--Los

Angeles.

Civil rights movements--California--Los Angeles--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_003, TRT: 3:28:12 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney grew up in Los Angeles, California. Her family's civil rights activity was often facilitated through her church, Holman Methodist Church. She recalls not being able to go to Disneyland until her late childhood due to their segregation policy and her family's participation in the grape protest in support of the United Farm Workers. Berger-Sweeney also talks about her mother's influence on her intellectual development. Her interest in science emerged when she was in middle school, at Monroe Junior High School, and developed further after becoming fascinated with the relationship between the brain and the body. In 1971, Berger-Sweeney began attending Morningside High School. She was a cheerleader, a member of the student council and enjoyed reading the works of W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright. After graduating in 1975, she went to Malaysia on a fellowship from the American Field Service (AFS). She talks about her experience there.

Civil rights movements--California--Los Angeles--History--20th century.

Disneyland (Calif.)--Social aspects.

African Americans--Segregation--Law and legislation--California.

Grape Strike, Calif., 1965-1970.

African American high school students--Intellectual life--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_004, TRT: 4:30:23 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney graduated from Morningside High School in Inglewood, California in 1975. She then spent the summer before entering college in Malaysia on a fellowship from the American Field Service. She reflects on her experience in Malaysia and talks about her decision to attend Wellesley College in Massachusetts. She majored in psychobiology, which was inspired by conversations she had with her mother. During her freshman year at Wellesley, her mother died of a brain aneurysm. She struggled with her academics that first year but managed to improve thereafter. After receiving her B.A. degree in 1979, Berger-Sweeney attended the University of California, Berkeley, where she founded a Black-student organization and studied environmental health sciences. She talks about her experience there, her post graduate employment opportunities, and her decision to pursue her doctoral degree in neurotoxicology at Johns Hopkins University.

American Field Service--Scholarships, fellowships, etc.

Malaysia--Description and travel.

African American college students.

Mothers--Death--Psychological aspects.

University of California, Berkeley--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_005, TRT: 5:28:44 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney received her Ph.D. degree in neurotoxicology from Johns Hopkins University in 1989. Her dissertation research focused on the effects of drugs on the functioning of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter that affects the process of learning and memory, in the basal forebrain. She describes her findings and talks about her experience working in Dr. Joseph Coyle's laboratory. In 1990, Berger-Sweeney did post-doctoral research at the National

Institute of Health and Medical Research in Paris, France. Her research there continued to focus on the neurobiology of learning and memory, and has contributed to studies on neurodevelopmental disorders, such as Rett Syndrome, and neurodegenerative disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease.

Neurotoxicology--Research.

Coyle, Joseph T.

Rett syndrome.

Neurodegenerative diseases--laboratory and clinical research.

Alzheimer's disease.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_006, TRT: 6:27:16 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney talks about Rett Syndrome, which is neurodevelopmental disorder caused by a genetic mutation that occurs in children, and primarily affects females. The disorder negatively effects growth, motor skills, communication abilities, breathing, and other organ functions. While there is no cure for the disorder, Berger-Sweeney's research is focused on understanding the disease by utilizing an animal model to test potential therapies and treatments. In 1991, she returned to her alma mater, Wellesley College, as an assistant professor. In 1995, she established the Minority Neuroscience Fellowship Program there, and was appointed as Associate Dean in 2004. She talks about her professional awards, which include the Young Investigator Award from the National Science Foundation and her appointment as fellow of the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society. In 2010, Berger-Sweeney was appointed as dean of Tuft University's School of Arts and Sciences; she talks about her experience there.

Rett syndrome.

Neurodevelopmental diseases--therapy.

Wellesley College.

Minorities--Science--Scholarships, fellowships, etc.

International Behavioral Neuroscience Society.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_007, TRT: 7:27:43 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney talks about her responsibilities as dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University. Under her leadership, along with the direction of Peniel Joseph, the Center on Race and Democracy was established in 2012. Also that year, she was appointed as fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She describes her goals for Tufts University, as well as how she balances her administrative responsibilities with her research duties. Berger-Sweeney talks about her hopes and concerns for the African American community, her children, her legacy and life choices, and how she would like to be remembered.

Tufts University. School of Arts and Sciences--Deans (Education).

Tufts University. Center for the Study of Race and Democracy.

Joseph, Peniel E.

American Association for the Advancement of Science.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Joanne Berger-Sweeney, Section A2013_008_001_008, TRT: 8:08:33 ?

Joanne Berger-Sweeney describes her photographs.

Photographs.