Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hon. Earlean Collins

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Collins, Earlean

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Earlean Collins,

Dates: August 15, 2000

Bulk Dates: 2000

Physical Description: 3 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:30:00).

Abstract: City commissioner and county commissioner Hon. Earlean Collins (-) was introduced to politics by her former husband Otis Collins. In 1976, Collins became the first African American female to be elected to the Illinois Senate. After twenty years in the Illinois State Senate, Collins was elected to be the Commissioner of the Cook County Board. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 15, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2000_047

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Earlean Collins was born in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, and was one of fourteen children. Collins moved to Chicago, Illinois, as a teenager and graduated from Wendell Phillips High School. She later attended the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Campus.

Collins’ introduction to Illinois politics came through her marriage to Otis Collins, who served for eight years in the Illinois House of Representatives. However, Collins and her husband separated and by 1975 she was living in Oak Park, Illinois, and working for the Department of Children and Family Services. She was encouraged at that time to run for a seat in the Illinois General Assembly. Collins became the first African American female to be elected to the Illinois Senate in 1976.

In the Senate, Collins served on the Committees on Insurance, Appropriations, Pensions & Licensed Activities and Elementary & Secondary Education. In addition, she chaired both the Transportation and the Developmentally Disabled Homeless Committees and was Vice-Chairperson of the Labor and Commerce Committee. She was the first African American female in a leadership position in the State Senate, serving as Democratic Leader of the Executive Committee. Among the pieces of legislation introduced by Collins was a proposal directing the Illinois police to draw up guidelines for high-speed pursuits. She also sponsored a bill to require handgun buyers to complete an eight-hour firearm safety course.

In 1994, Collins ran for the position of State Comptroller of Illinois. She received the nomination of her party, but was ultimately defeated. Five years later, she resigned from the Senate after two decades to run for Commissioner of the Cook County Board, where she currently serves. Remarried, Collins is the mother of one son. She has been
hONORED BY THE CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE, RECEIVING THEIR “BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE AWARD.”

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This life oral history interview with Hon. Earlean Collins was conducted by Adele Hodge on August 15, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacam SP videocassettes. City commissioner and county commissioner Hon. Earlean Collins ( - ) was introduced to politics by her former husband Otis Collins. In 1976, Collins became the first African American female to be elected to the Illinois Senate. After twenty years in the Illinois State Senate, Collins was elected to be the Commissioner of the Cook County Board.

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, Earlean

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

(Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Hon. Earlean Collins--Interviews

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews.
State governments--Officials and employees--Interviews.

County officials and employees--Illinois--Interviews.

**Organizations:**

- HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- Cook County (Ill.)
- Cook County (Ill.)
- Cook County (Ill.)
- Illinois

**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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 7/16/2012 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
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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, August 15, 2000

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Earlean Collins, Section A2000_047_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 2000/08/15

Earlean Collins was raised in the Mississippi Delta town of Rollingfork as a middle child among fourteen siblings. Collins described her family as warm. She also expressed admiration for her father, Charlie Branch, a church minister. She considered her mother, Carry Glasper Branch, to be her role model. Collins relayed a story of how when she was young, a white neighbor entered the Branch home unannounced, and her father confronted him. Collins attended Henry Weathers Elementary School and Sharkey County High School in Mississippi and excelled in civics and government classes. Her experiences both at home and at school provided her with a respect for education and black history. After her second year of high school, her family gradually migrated to Chicago where she attended Wendell Phillips High School. She discussed how the people that surrounded her frequently encouraged her next steps in life, such as running for Illinois State Senator.

African American legislators--Illinois--Interviews.
State governments--Officials and employees--Interviews.
County officials and employees--Illinois--Interviews.
Race relations--Mississippi--Rollingfork.
African American students--Mississippi.
Education, Primary--Mississippi--Rollingfork.
African American history.
Illinois--Politics and government.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Earlean Collins, Section A2000_047_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2000/08/15

Earlean Collins completed Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago and took college courses at Chicago Teachers College [Chicago State University]. While taking graduate courses at the University of Illinois and Sangamon State University, Collins and her husband, state representative Otis Collins, were divorced. In 1975, Collins moved to Oak Park, Illinois, where women circulated petitions to enter her into the race for Illinois State Senator. In 1976, Collins was elected as the first woman and the first African American woman to serve as an Illinois State Senator. As a senator, Collins assisted senior citizens, students, and young mothers through legislation and volunteering efforts. When Collins resigned from the Senate in 1988, she was encouraged by colleagues to run for the Cook County Board. She was elected Commissioner of the Cook County Board where she chaired the Family Court and Juvenile Detention Center Committee.

African American women legislators--Illinois.
Earlean Collins discussed the challenges of balancing personal life and politics. She described how her life changed after being elected a public official. Collins would like to be remembered as a person who respected the values and principles behind the United States Government. She would like to see people in government working with honesty and integrity. Collins explained that as an elected official, she did her best to do what she believed was right within the context of politics. She also talked about her interests outside of politics, such as golf, listening to music, and playing cards.

Campaign funds--United States.
Campaign funds--Law and legislation--United States.