

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable 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, 1937-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Earlean Collins,
Dates:	August 15, 2000
Bulk Dates:	2000
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:30:00).
Abstract:	City commissioner and county commissioner The Honorable Earlean Collins (1937 -) 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 The Honorable Earlean Collins was conducted by Adele Hodge on August 15, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. City commissioner and county commissioner The Honorable Earlean Collins (1937 -) 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, 1937-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hayes, Frank (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Collins, Earlean, 1937---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

Occupations:

City Commissioner

County Commissioner

County Government Official

State Senator

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 Earlean Collins, August 15, 2000. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Earlean Collins,
Section A2000_047_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 2000/08/15

Earlean Collins talks about her family history. Her father, Charlie Branch was a church minister who was well-respected in the community. Collins' parents raised their eight children in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, a town in the Mississippi Delta. Although her father died when she was five, Collins remembers growing up in a loving family;

she was very close to her mother. Collins attended Henry Weathers Elementary School and Sharkey County High School in Mississippi. After her second year of high school, Collins' moved to Chicago where she attended Wendell Phillips High School. Collins' independence emerged early on, and as a school girl, she embraced performing and public speaking; she also excelled in her civics and government classes. Collins also describes her experiences with racism, influential teachers, the importance of knowing and telling black history, and running for the Illinois General Assembly in 1975.

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 The Honorable Earlean Collins,
Section A2000_047_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2000/08/15

Earlean Collins conducted undergraduate work at Chicago Teachers College and the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Campus. After graduation, Collins enrolled in graduate courses at Sangamon State University, she did not complete the program. In 1976, she became the first African American female senator in the Illinois General Assembly, and the first African American woman to hold a leadership position in the state senate. As a senator, Collins assisted senior citizens, students, and teenage mothers. Collins resigned from her senate post in 1988 and ran a successful campaign for the Cook County Board. As Cook County Commissioner, Collins focused on juvenile detention and prescription drug abuse. Collins also talks her former husband, state representative Otis Collins and national unity.

Women's Rights--Illinois--1970-1980.

Elections--Illinois--1970-1980.

Illinois--Politics and government--1980-1990.

African American women legislators--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Earlean Collins,
Section A2000_047_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 2000/08/15

Earlean Collins describes the challenges of balancing her personal life and with her political life. She also talks about her legacy, her experiences campaigning, and her hobbies, which include golf and traveling.

Divorce--United States--1970-1980.

Campaign funds--United States.

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