

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Alexis Herman

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Herman, Alexis M., 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman,
Dates:	April 23, 2003, July 15, 2003 and June 30, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	14 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:49:07).
Abstract:	Cabinet appointee The Honorable Alexis Herman (1947 -) is the former U.S. Secretary of Labor. Herman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2003, July 15, 2003 and June 30, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_087
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The first African American to become the secretary of labor, Alexis M. Herman was born in Mobile, Alabama, on July 16, 1947. Her mother was a teacher in Mobile and her father was the first black politician elected in the South since Reconstruction. After graduating from a Catholic high school, Herman attended Xavier University in New Orleans, graduating in 1969.

Herman began her career in 1969 as a social worker for Catholic Charities, developing employment training opportunities for unemployed youth. From there, she was hired by the Department of Labor. At age twenty-nine, Herman became the youngest person to hold the position of Director of the Women's Bureau, and while there, Herman pressured Delta Airlines and Coca-Cola to hire female professionals. It was also during this time that she met future President Bill Clinton. She formed A.M. Herman & Associates in 1981, advising state and local governments on labor markets until 1989. She also later became the National Director of the Minority Women Employment Program of R-T-P, Inc., where she established programs to place minority women in white-collar and nontraditional jobs.

Returning to government service in 1989, Herman joined the Democratic National Committee as chief of staff on the suggestion of longtime friend Ron Brown, and by 1992 was the CEO of the Democratic National Convention. After Clinton's election in 1992, Herman was appointed assistant to the president and director of the White House Public Liaison Office in 1993. When Clinton was reelected, he appointed her the twenty-third secretary of labor. Her appointment was not without controversy, however, as many labor leaders did not support her. Later, Herman would be implicated in one of the improper fundraisers held at the White House. She weathered both of these storms unscathed, continuing to fight for minority and women's rights in the workplace.

Today, Herman tours the country in speaking engagements, speaking of her own entrepreneurial ventures, her time in the Department of Labor, and her grandmother's advice. She chairs the Coca-Cola Company Task Force and the Toyota Advisory Board on Diversity. She sits on the board of MGM/Mirage, Inc. and is actively involved in the

National Urban League and the Ron Brown Foundation. Herman and her husband, Dr. Charles Franklin, live in Virginia.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on April 23, 2003, July 15, 2003 and June 30, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes. Cabinet appointee The Honorable Alexis Herman (1947 -) is the former U.S. Secretary of Labor.

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:

Herman, Alexis M., 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Herman, Alexis M., 1947- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Dept. of Labor.

Occupations:

Cabinet Appointee

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 Alexis Herman, April 23, 2003, July 15, 2003 and June 30, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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 Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_001,
TRT: 0:30:55 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman was born in Mobile, Alabama, on July 16, 1947. Her mother, Gloria Broadus, was raised by her grandmother and mother in a poor family in Mobile. Herman's father, Alex Herman, descended from an Italian who fell in love with his house slave. Her paternal grandmother, Alice Sigmonetti, married George Herman, a descendant of Germans who settled in Alabama under the order of Queen Isabella of Spain. Her mother became pregnant with Herman out of wedlock which was taboo in the deep South, but she graduated from Alabama State College and became a teacher in Mobile. Herman recalls her last conversation with her mother before she passed away. Herman's father was the first black politician elected in the South since Reconstruction when he represented Ward 10 in Mobile, Alabama. Her father was very involved in her life, worked as an insurance company executive, and was a civil rights activist who trained her to desegregate restaurants. Herman describes her earliest memory and growing up in Mobile, Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_002,
TRT: 0:31:13 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman describes growing up in Mobile, Alabama. She remembers the smell of azalea flowers, gumbo, and cleaning products, seeing the fancy hats at church on Sundays, and her father's singing. Herman attended Catholic schools, and she describes the social activism of the four black Catholic churches in Mobile. Her father's civil rights activism stemmed from his brief stint in the Negro Baseball League where he played with Satchel Paige and traveled North. Her father won his lawsuit against the Democratic Party for denying his absentee ballot in the 1940s. At five years old, Herman hid in the car with a pistol while her father was badly beaten by white men on the drive home from a meeting at Father Warren's house. Fearing trouble, Father Warren and others followed her father home and took him to the hospital. At age fifteen, Herman became indignant when she saw that her school was not listed with the white schools in the newspaper for the May Day celebration and she decided to confront Bishop Toolen.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:59 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman recalls confronting Bishop Thomas Joseph Toolen at the May Day Festival when she was fifteen. She snuck into his changing quarters and showed him a newspaper clipping of the black school she attended, Heart of Mary, being not listed. The next morning at school, Herman was called to the principal's office and expelled. Her mentor and teacher, Sister Patricia told her that she did the right thing, and her father organized a boycott until the Mobile, Alabama Catholic schools agreed to desegregate. The next year their school participated in the May Day procession for the first time. Herman describes her surrogate grandmother, Margaret Dozier, who she visited during the summer in Chicago, Illinois. Herman believed her parents were divorced until a friend told her in third grade that her parents had never married. In order to compensate for being born out of wedlock, Herman earned good grades and was well-behaved. She talks about her childhood friends including HistoryMaker Peggy Cooper Cafritz.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_004,
TRT: 0:30:50 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman talks about her education and early career. Herman attended Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin and then moved back to Mobile,

Alabama when her father had a stroke. During that time, she took classes at Springhill College and was told a bank executive of her potential as a secretary. She transferred to Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana where she graduated in 1969. She then became a social worker for Catholic Charities. Herman was selected as a delegate at the White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1971 where she met HistoryMaker Ernest Green and reconnected with Lamont Godwin and HistoryMaker Peggy Cooper Cafritz. Green informed Herman about his project with Ray Marshall, a labor organizer and economist, who wanted to use Ingalls Shipyard in Mississippi, Pascagoula to integrate the skilled trade unions. Herman convinced them to open an office in Mobile, Alabama where she provided training opportunities for unemployed youth in the housing projects.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_005, TRT: 0:29:55 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman describes attending Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin where she was one of only two black students. She socialized at the Rathskeller at the University of Wisconsin's to meet other black people. When she brought several young, black men from the Air Force Base in Madison to a social mixer, the music stopped and the Chaplain forced them to leave. In 1972, Herman moved to Atlanta, Georgia to work with Ray Marshall on a Ford Foundation-funded research project to explore how to integrate black women into white collar jobs. Herman worked with major companies, such as Delta Airlines, Coca-Cola and Xerox, to encourage them to hire black women. She built relationships with black men working at those companies and with white executive secretaries while her childhood friend, Paulette, coached the women on interviewing techniques. The program in Atlanta was so successful that Herman expanded it to Houston, Texas and then to ten cities where it became known as the Minority Women's Employment Program.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_001_006, TRT: 0:25:31 2003/04/23

Alexis Herman describes becoming the youngest person to hold the position of Director of the Women's Bureau. Ray Marshall, Secretary of Labor under President Jimmy Carter, nominated Herman for the position. She initially declined but after encouragement from her mentors, Dorothy Height, Bayard Rustin, Andrew Young, and A. Philip Randolph, she accepted the position. Herman learned to navigate the Senate confirmation process against her opponent Arvonne Fraser and organize her core constituencies of civil rights activists, Catholics, shipyard workers and her programs involving minority women. Upon her confirmation, Herman, with her staff of over five hundred, worked to open up skilled trade unions to women and advocated for pregnancy leave. Herman describes A. Philip Randolph as a wonderful storyteller who took great pride in organizing the March on Washington. Herman recalls that HistoryMaker Andrew Young encouraged her when she worked on black women's employment programming in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_002_007, TRT: 0:30:30 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman describes her tenure as Director of the Women's Bureau in the U.S. Department of Labor during President Jimmy Carter's administration. She successfully advocated to amend Title VII of the Civil Rights Bill to say that discrimination based on pregnancy is a form of sex discrimination. Herman learned to navigate the vicissitudes of the legislative process and to package public policy with public need. Herman lists Eleanor Holmes Norton, Judith

Lichtman, Gloria Johnson and HistoryMaker Dorothy Height as leaders on women's issues in the late 1970s. She bridged racial differences in displaced homemaker legislation to include both divorced middle aged white women and single black mothers whose children aged out of welfare benefits. Herman learned to craft legislation that appealed to the greater good but also to legislators' self-interest. She formed A.M. Herman & Associates in 1981 where she advised state and local governments and private companies like Procter & Gamble on labor market issues.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_002_008, TRT: 0:31:10 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman talks about her consulting career and becoming involved with the Democratic National Committee. As a consultant to Procter & Gamble and other major corporations, Herman conducted research on corporate culture and created strategies to retain minority women and executive staff following mergers and acquisitions. In the late 1980s, Herman took a sabbatical to write but was approached by HistoryMaker Ron Brown to work on his campaign to become chairman of the Democratic Party. After Brown was elected in 1989, Herman stayed on to help him restructure the party and hire a diverse and talented administrative team. Chairman Brown convinced Herman to accept the position as his Chief of Staff for a one year commitment. She left her consulting firm in the hands of her partner Gloria Gutierrez. Herman ascribes Brown's success to his preparation, his clear agenda to elect a democratic president in 1992, and his commitment to running the party like a campaign focusing on winning that year's elections.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_002_009, TRT: 0:30:34 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman committed to be the Democratic National Committee's chief of staff for one year. Herman describes Ron Brown's single-minded focus on making decisions to insure that a Democrat would be elected President in 1992. Alexis Herman recalls the Democratic Party's electoral success in 1989 with Doug Wilder's becoming Virginia's first black governor, James Florio being elected New Jersey governor and David Dinkins' mayoral victory in New York City. Herman recalls attending the Democratic Governors Meeting in Mobile, Alabama where her mother made gumbo for Bill Clinton. Her mother died two weeks later. Herman took a bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon to Ron Brown and asked if he truly believed that a Democratic president could be elected despite President George H.W. Bush's high approval rating, and Brown said yes. Herman agreed to become the CEO of the Democratic National Convention in 1991 drawing on her previous experience with the Jimmy Carter and Jesse Jackson campaigns.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_003_010, TRT: 0:30:46 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman recalls working for President Jimmy Carter's administration. She comments on Carter's strained relationship with the black community which she attributes to African Americans' support of Senator Ted Kennedy, the Iran-Contra scandal overshadowing domestic policies, and the resignation of Ambassador Andrew Young. While participating in HistoryMaker Dorothy Height's National Council of Negro Women, Herman met HistoryMakers Ron and Alma Brown which led to an enduring friendship and political partnership. Herman describes the logistics of being CEO of the 1992 Democratic Convention including security, transportation, and conveying the party's platform to a live televised audience. She believes that her successful

management of the convention was due to working closely with all of the primary candidates and finalizing the logistics two months prior to the event. In the months leading up to the 1992 election, Herman then worked on Bill Clinton's Transition Planning team in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_003_011, TRT: 0:30:15 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman describes her roles during President Bill Clinton's first term in office. Herman recalls celebrating the presidential election victory with Al and Tipper Gore and Bill and Hillary Clinton. She was tapped to serve as Deputy Chairman of the Transition Planning Team where she headed transition efforts in Washington, D.C. Herman was surprised by the number of people who showed up to volunteer during the transition and she realized that African Americans did not know this was the way to get jobs in a new administration. Herman describes the clusters formed to help select Cabinet members and her role in coordinating these efforts, particularly in naming Federico Pena as Secretary of Transportation. After turning down five offers to serve as deputy secretary to various Cabinet members, Herman was appointed assistant to the president and director of the White House Public Liaison Office in 1993, where she garnered public support for policies, responded to constituencies and coordinated major events.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_003_012, TRT: 0:31:12 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman describes the difficult nomination and confirmation process to become President Bill Clinton's Secretary of Labor. Although she garnered support from the civil rights, business, and faith communities, the labor movement initially backed Harris Wofford. Her confirmation was delayed as controversy over her business operations and improper fundraisers emerged which were later proved to be unfounded. As the U.S. Secretary of Labor, Herman personally handled the UPS strike negotiations, eventually locking the two sides in at a hotel until they forged an agreement. Herman outlined four priorities: to redo the employment training system, be a leader on Welfare to Work, lower the African American youth unemployment rate, and forge a global consensus to reduce child labor. Herman reflects on her success at meeting her goals but regrets not being able to stay on longer to see the initiatives through. Herman married Charles Franklin in February 2000 while campaigning for Al Gore.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_003_013, TRT: 0:31:17 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman talks about the contested 2000 Presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush. Herman knew that Al Gore was defeated when the U.S. Supreme Court became involved in the election process. In the year following the electoral defeat, Herman spent time reflecting on her own future and counseled her staff who were without employment. She accepted speaking engagements and joined corporate boards. Herman recalls the advice given to her by HistoryMakers Colin Powell to come up with a five-part plan involving speeches, business opportunities, nonprofit relationships, being a political figure, and her personal life. Herman talks about focusing on her family and working on Coca-Cola Company's class action settlement. While Herman views herself as still emerging, Herman sees her legacy as doing breakthrough work as the first African American female in the Labor Department and for helping other women break barriers in major companies in the 1970s. Herman concludes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alexis Herman, Section A2003_087_003_014,
TRT: 0:15:00 2003/06/30

Alexis Herman narrates her photographs.