

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janis F. Kearney

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Kearney, Janis F.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney,
Dates:	December 3, 2003 and November 7, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:41:54).
Abstract:	Presidential diarist and presidential appointee Janis F. Kearney (1953 -) was President Clinton's personal diarist. Kearney was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 3, 2003 and November 7, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_262
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in Gould, Arkansas, Janis Kearney was one of eighteen children of parents Ethel V. Kearney and James Kearney. After graduating from Gould High School in 1971, Kearney attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, earning a B.A. in journalism in 1976. She continued on with her education while working, earning thirty hours towards a M.P.A. from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

After earning her B.A. degree, Kearney was hired by the State of Arkansas in 1978, where she spent three years as a program manager for the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program, and another six years as the director of information for the national headquarters of the Migrant Student Records Transfer System. Leaving government work, Kearney purchased the *Arkansas State Press* newspaper from Daisey Bates in 1987. She published the weekly paper for five years before joining the Clinton-Gore presidential campaign in 1992, where she served as director of minority media outreach. The following year, Kearney joined President Bill Clinton's transition team. She began with the White House Media Affairs Office before being appointed as the director of public affairs and communications for the U.S. Small Business Administration, where she worked until 1995. That year, Kearney became the first presidential diarist in U.S. history, chronicling President Clinton's day-to-day life. She remained in this capacity until President Clinton left office. Kearney came under scrutiny during the Starr Committee proceedings when her diary and testimony were subpoenaed. No wrongdoing was found.

After President Clinton left office, Kearney was named a fellow at Harvard University's W.E.B. DuBois Institute in 2001, where she began work on a book about President Clinton entitled *Conversations: William Jefferson Clinton-From Hope to Harlem*. Kearney and her husband, former White House director of presidential personnel Bob Nash, are no strangers to the issues of race that still plague America. They were racially profiled by police following a car-jacking of a vehicle similar to theirs while still employed at the White House. Kearney served as the Chancellor's Lecturer at the City Colleges of Chicago and continued her DuBois Institute writing project, as well as her work on *Cotton Field of Dreams: A Memoir* until moving with her husband and son to Arkansas.

Kearney was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 7, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Janis F. Kearney was conducted by Ray Parr Moore and Scott Stearns on December 3, 2003 and November 7, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Presidential diarist and presidential appointee Janis F. Kearney (1953 -) was President Clinton's personal diarist.

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:

Kearney, Janis F.

Moore, Ray Parr (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Kearney, Janis F.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Presidential Appointee

Presidential Diarist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|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 Janis F. Kearney, December 3, 2003 and November 7, 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 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 Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?
Janis Kearney was born on September 29, 1953 in Gould, Arkansas to James

Kearney and Ethel Curry Kearney as the fourteenth of nineteen children. Kearney's parents were sharecroppers who grew cotton, fruit, and vegetables. As a child, Kearney spent many hours working in the field with the rest of her family. Her earliest memory is of celebrating her birthday with a cake. She also remembers the smell of sweet potatoes baking and the sound of owls. The Kearney children were raised in a close-knit rural community with black and white neighbors. Kearney's family was active in the Baptist church where her father was a deacon and both her parents taught Sunday school. Kearney did not realize her poverty until she began grade school where Jessie Freeman and Ruby Jones were influential teachers. Kearney was an avid reader and wanted to become a missionary. In 1967, due to freedom of choice, Kearney started attending Gould High School in Gould, Arkansas before the school was fully integrated.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Janis Kearney enrolled at Gould High School in Gould, Arkansas in 1967 under Freedom of Choice. After the school was fully integrated, Kearney's grades and social life improved. She no longer felt ostracized by white students and teachers who moved to private academies. Kearney was a member of Future Homemakers of America, student council, and the cheerleading squad. After graduating in 1971, Kearney attended the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. As one of the few African American students on campus, Kearney formed close relationships with other black students. Together they formed Black Americans for Democracy where issues like black student athletes and black teachers were discussed. During her sophomore year, Kearney married Darryl Lunon. She graduated in 1966 with a B.A. in journalism. She then moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she worked with the Comprehensive Employment Training Act program while conducting graduate study in public administration at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_003, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Janis Kearney started working full-time as the deputy director of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act [CETA] program in Arkansas while pursuing graduate studies at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 1978. After two years, she transitioned into the Migrant Education Program where she was the director of information. After six years, she joined Daisy Bates as the managing editor of the Arkansas State Press in 1987. At the paper, Kearney wrote articles and worked to improve the quality and reputation of the paper. Kearney first learned about Daisy Bates from her father, who greatly admired the Arkansan civil rights activist. Bates became a mentor to Kearney and with Bates' health in decline, Kearney purchased Arkansas State Press in 1987. As the owner of the small paper, Kearney acquired a wide range of skills from developing pictures to arranging newspaper layouts to soliciting ads. Kearney ran the paper for five years while raising a teenaged son.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_004, TRT: 0:29:09 ?

Janis Kearney worked to improve the quality of Arkansas State Press by raising its presence in the community, increasing circulation, and generating more advertising revenue. In 1992, Kearney took a sabbatical from the paper to work on Bill Clinton's presidential campaign as his director of minority media outreach. Kearney first met Clinton while he was the governor of Arkansas through her brother who worked in the Arkansas Attorney General's Office. During the campaign, Kearney worked with Clinton's press secretaries, Dee Dee Myers and HistoryMaker Avis Lavelle. Kearney describes her duties as a press officer, and the experience of working on a presidential campaign. She was

struck by the nation's response to Clinton and Clinton's ability to change people's minds. Kearney also describes her role in the 1992 Democratic National Convention. After the 1993 election, Kearney officially left the Arkansas State Press and accepted an invitation to the White House as a media affairs officer.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_005, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Janis Kearney was hired by HistoryMaker Avis LaVelle as the director of minority media outreach for Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. Controversial issues during the Clinton campaign were handled by his two press secretaries, Avis LaVelle and Dee Dee Myers. After the 1992 Democratic National Convention, Kearney joined Clinton's transition office in Little Rock, Arkansas. Other members of the transition team included Mack McLarty, Eli Segal, and Harold M. Ickes. Kearney was then selected to join Clinton in Washington, D.C. as a media affairs officer. Kearney describes her work in the inaugural committee office before President Clinton's inauguration and her memories of the inauguration itself. After the inauguration, Kearney began working in the Media Affairs Office under supervisor Jeff Eller. Kearney explains the Media Affairs Office's role in coordinating press outreach and building long-term relationships with domestic and international press. She married HistoryMaker Bob Nash in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_006, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Janis Kearney transitioned to the U.S. Small Business Administration [SBA] as the director of communications in 1993 after three months in the White House Media Affairs Office. At the time, the SBA was led by Erskine Bowles. Kearney describes background checks conducted on presidential appointees. In 1995, Kearney became the first presidential diarist to chronicle the president's daily activities making Kearney privy to many of the president's meetings. One of Kearney's most memorable moments from her time in the White House was when President Clinton recognized the Little Rock Nine with Congressional Medals of Honor in recognition of their integration of Central High School in 1997. Kearney knew Elizabeth Eckford, Minnijean Brown-Trickey, and HistoryMaker Ernest Green personally. Kearney also talks about President Clinton's unprecedented appointment of over sixty African Americans to the White House, the Monica Lewinsky Scandal, and accompanying the president on his 1998 trip to Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_001_007, TRT: 0:17:20 ?

Janis Kearney moved to Chicago, Illinois in 2001 after completing her tenure as President Bill Clinton's personal diarist. At the time, her husband, HistoryMaker Bob Nash was the vice chair of ShoreBank. In Chicago, Kearney concentrated on writing a biography on Clinton, "Conversations: William Jefferson Clinton-From Hope to Harlem" as well as her own memoir, "Cotton Field of Dreams". Significant events in Kearney's memoir include her mother's passing in 1982, her sister's suicide in 1987, and her parents' legacy. Kearney talks about her parents' influence in her life, her value for honesty, and her commitment to giving back to her community. She also describes how she would like to be remembered. Kearney reflects upon her legacy, her hopes and regrets, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Janis F. Kearney, Section A2003_262_002_008, TRT: 0:28:27 ?

Janis Kearney narrates her photographs.