

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Vera Hall

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Hall, Vera, 1937- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Vera Hall, |
| Dates: | June 2, 2004 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2004 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:52). |
| Abstract: | Education administrator and city council member The Honorable Vera Hall (1937 -) was elected as the first African American woman chair of a state democratic party. Hall has also held appointments on the Maryland state central committee, as a reading specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education, assistant superintendent of state schools, and as a liaison at Morgan State University. Hall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 2, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2004_060 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Vera P. Hall was born on February 17, 1937 in Bolton, North Carolina. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a barber. As a child, Hall enjoyed reading and sewing, even creating her own patterns. She earned a diploma from Armour High School in Armour, North Carolina in 1955. While in school, she was a member of the Hobby and Glee clubs and worked as a school bus driver.

Upon graduation, Hall married her husband, Lawrence, while attending design school in Raleigh, North Carolina. While married with a young child she attended Coppin College and earned her B.S. degree in 1962. She worked as an educator in the Baltimore City public school system from 1962-1975. In 1963, Hall helped to integrate city schools when she was the first African American teacher assigned to an all white school in the city's "Little Italy" community. During that time she became involved in Maryland state politics, and in 1972 she was appointed to the state central committee by former Maryland Governor, Marvin Mandell.

From 1975 until 1979, Hall worked as a reading specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education. In 1979, she was promoted to assistant superintendent of state schools; she held that post until 1983. Hall was successful in merging education and politics when she accepted a job as legislative liaison at Morgan State University from 1983-1992. While working at Morgan she successfully ran for a seat on the Baltimore City Council. Hall represented the city's fifth district from 1987-1995. While serving on the council, she also held the position of vice chair of the Maryland Democratic Party from 1989-1992.

Hall made history in 1992 when she was elected as the first African American woman chair of a state democratic party, a position she won by just one vote. Three years later she unsuccessfully ran for Baltimore City Council President and lost by less than 5000 votes.

Hall is an avid quilter and seamstress. She and her husband have two adult children and live in Baltimore, Maryland.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Vera Hall was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on June 2, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education administrator and city council member The Honorable Vera Hall (1937 -) was elected as the first African American woman chair of a state democratic party. Hall has also held appointments on the Maryland state central committee, as a reading specialist for the Maryland State Department of Education, assistant superintendent of state schools, and as a liaison at Morgan State University.

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:

Hall, Vera, 1937-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hall, Vera, 1937---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Baltimore City Public Schools

Occupations:

Education Administrator

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers|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 Vera Hall, June 2, 2004. 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 Vera Hall, Section A2004_060_001_001, TRT: 0:30:08 2004/06/02

The Honorable Vera Hall was born on February 17, 1937 in Bolton, North Carolina. Her mother, Kara Elizabeth Blanks Webb, was born in East Arcadia, North Carolina. Hall's maternal grandfather was a carpenter and a blacksmith. Her maternal grandmother was very religious, and Hall and her sister lived at her house during the winter to attend school. A homemaker, Hall's mother enjoyed needle arts, fishing and hunting. Hall's father, Wiley Haynes Webb, was born in Bolton and was a barber who operated three barbershops. Hall has a mixed white, Native American and black ancestry on both sides of her family. Hall's parents were civic-minded and hosted people in the community from all walks of life at their home. Hall attended church, although she preferred Sunday school. She read Shakespeare and the Bible, and taught the adult Sunday school class when she was sixteen years old. Hall is the second oldest of five children.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Vera Hall, Section A2004_060_001_002, TRT: 0:30:17 2004/06/02

The Honorable Vera Hall and her sister Barbara Webb stayed with their maternal grandmother, Ada Blanks, in East Arcadia, North Carolina where they attended elementary school. Hall and her sister would take turns

returning home to their parents on the weekends. Hall remembers her favorite teachers, including a former U.S. military officer who told stories and had his students march around the playground. Hall often visited the school library to read romance novels. Growing up, she aspired to be a designer and considered herself bookish. Hall attended Armor High School where she drove two school bus routes and met her husband, Lawrence Hall. After graduating from high school at the top of her class in 1955, she attended a small design school in Raleigh, North Carolina but dropped out because she was more advanced than the curriculum. She moved to Baltimore, Maryland with her husband who forced her to apply to Coppin State Teachers College. Hall completed Coppin while raising her first son.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Vera Hall, Section A2004_060_001_003, TRT: 0:30:27 2004/06/02

The Honorable Vera Hall and her husband moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where Hall's sister already lived, after his father died. Hall began student teaching in 1961 and graduated from Coppin State Teachers College in 1962. She was struck by the poor reading skills of her students and returned to school at Morgan State College to take courses in developmental reading. Hall was reassigned to David E. Weglein School in East Baltimore to integrate the teaching staff of the school. At Weglein, Hall developed a reputation as a skilled teacher and disciplinarian that worked well with students with behavior problems and learning deficiencies. In 1965, she developed a reading program to address her students' reading deficits. The program taught reading based on real world experiences. Her novel approach to reading was recognized by the State of Maryland Department of Education. During the 1970s, Hall was promoted to a senior teacher and became politically galvanized around the issue of teacher accountability.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Vera Hall, Section A2004_060_001_004, TRT: 0:30:20 2004/06/02

The Honorable Vera Hall was appointed to the Democratic Party State Central Committee in 1972 where she served for two terms. Hall worked on Project STAR to improve

reading instruction in Maryland for the Maryland State Department of Education (DOE) under the leadership of David W. Hornbeck. She recalls an incident when a former superintendent of special education was fired for distributing a racially insensitive memo. Hall worked at DOE's Division of Instruction as assistant to the superintendent before accepting a position as State Relations Director at Morgan State University (MSU); MSU had received less funding from the State of Maryland than majority white institutions. Hall ran for Baltimore City Council in 1987. Her campaign was temporarily compromised, when she became critically ill with endocarditis. Nevertheless, she won the election and represented the Fifth District for four years. Hall retired from MSU in 1991 and also served as vice-chair of the Democratic Party for Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Vera Hall, Section A2004_060_001_005, TRT: 0:22:40 2004/06/02

The Honorable Vera Hall was vice-chair of Maryland's Democratic Party when the chairman resigned following the National Convention. Although she was next in line for the position, a newspaper article announced Hall and Michael D. Barnes as co-chair. Hall successfully defeated Barnes and became the first African American woman chair of a state democratic party in 1992. As chairwoman, Hall successfully delivered President Bill Clinton a victory in Maryland in the 1992 presidential election, and worked with Clinton and Baltimore Mayor HistoryMaker Kurt Schmoke to secure funding to revdevelop Baltimore's public housing projects. Hall reflects upon the impact of her accomplishments, her legacy and how she would like to be remembered. Hall concludes by narrating her photographs.