

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janette Hoston Harris

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harris, Janette Hoston, 1939-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Janette Hoston Harris,
Dates:	August 10, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:12:12).
Abstract:	City historian Janette Hoston Harris (1939 - 2018) and six other students were arrested for attempting to desegregate an all-white lunch counter; the arrest resulted in her expulsion from Southern University, and by order of the governor, her being prohibited from attending any college in the state of Louisiana. Harris's case became part of the Supreme Court case, <i>Garner v. Louisiana</i> . Harris went on to become the first city historian for Washington, D.C. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 10, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_122
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

City historian Dr. Janette Hoston Harris was born on September 7, 1939, in Monroe, Louisiana; her mother, Maud Marrie Hoston, was a homemaker and her father, Eluin Homer Hoston, was a printer and businessman who opened the first shoe store in Louisiana for African Americans, "Hoston's Shoes and Bootery." In 1956, Harris earned her high school diploma from Carroll High School in Monroe, Louisiana, where she was a member of the English and spelling bee clubs and the basketball team. From 1956 until 1960, Harris attended Southern University, where she was active in the Methodist club, a co-founder of Gamma Sigma Sigma sorority, and captain of the drill team. In 1960, during her senior year, Harris and six other students were arrested for attempting to desegregate an all-white lunch counter. The arrest resulted in her expulsion from Southern University and, by order of the governor, her being prohibited from attending any college in the state of Louisiana. Harris completed her education at Central State University in Ohio, where she earned her B.A. degree in psychology in 1962.

While attending Central State in 1960, Harris's case challenging segregation, "*Hoston v. the State of Louisiana*," went to the Louisiana Supreme Court. Harris's case eventually became part of a larger court challenge, "*Garner v. Louisiana*," that was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1961; the case was argued and won by future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in 1962.

After her graduation, Harris worked in the selection division of the Peace Corps. From 1964 until 1970, Harris had a career in education, teaching second, fourth, fifth and sixth grades in Washington, D.C. public schools. From 1970 until 1972, Harris worked as a research associate for the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. Harris earned her master's degree in history in 1972 from Howard University, and her Ph.D. degree in 1975. In 1975, Harris began teaching history at Federal City College, now known as the University of the District

of Columbia. That same year she established a consulting firm, JOR Associates. From 1979 until 1980, Harris served as campaign manager for the Carter / Mondale Re-election Campaign. In 1991, Harris was appointed director of educational affairs for Washington, D.C., where she remained for a year. For the next three years, Harris served as director of the Office of Intergovernmental Relations in the Mayor's Office; in 1998, she was appointed city historian for Washington, D.C., the first person to hold the post.

Harris continued to serve as city historian; over the course of her career, she was the recipient of numerous awards for her civic and educational commitment. In 2004, Harris, along with her fellow sit-in students, was invited back to Southern University to receive the degree she was denied in 1960.

Harris passed away on November 2, 2018.

Dr. Janette Hoston Harris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 10, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Janette Hoston Harris was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 10, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. City historian Janette Hoston Harris (1939 - 2018) and six other students were arrested for attempting to desegregate an all-white lunch counter; the arrest resulted in her expulsion from Southern University, and by order of the governor, her being prohibited from attending any college in the state of Louisiana. Harris's case became part of the Supreme Court case, *Garner v. Louisiana*. Harris went on to become the first city historian for Washington, D.C.

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:

Harris, Janette Hoston, 1939-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Harris, Janette Hoston, 1939---Interviews

African American historians--Interviews.

African American scholars--Interviews.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington (D.C.)

Occupations:

City Historian

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Janette Hoston Harris, August 10, 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 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 Janette Hoston Harris, Section A2004_122_001_001, TRT: 0:30:34 ?

Janette Hoston Harris was born on September 7, 1939 in Monroe, Louisiana. Her mother, Maud Marrie Hoston, was born in 1916 in Monroe to a father who was originally from Prussia and worked on the railroad and a mother who worked as a domestic. Harris's mother was raised in a middle-class family, and while her complexion allowed her to pass as white, she chose not to. Harris's father, Eluen Homer Hoston, Sr., was also born in Monroe. A strong-willed activist and entrepreneur, he organized voter registrations in his community, opened a swimming pool and library and owned a shoe store. Harris used to visit her paternal grandmother in Pine Bluff, Arkansas until her grandmother moved to Monroe. Harris remembers selling worms and crickets to fishermen and leading the Methodist Youth Fellowship at St. James United Methodist Church. During her time at Carroll High School, she embraced her father's activism by refusing to drink from colored water fountains or sit in the back of the bus. Harris has two siblings.

African American families--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American children--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American mothers--Louisiana.

African American fathers--Louisiana.

Louisiana--Social conditions.

African American civil rights activists.

African American neighborhood--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American churches--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American children--Social conditions.

Human skin color--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Janette Hoston Harris, Section A2004_122_001_002, TRT: 0:30:32 ?

Janette Hoston Harris attended Mt. Nebo School in Monroe, Louisiana where she was a mischievous but dedicated student who enjoyed acting in plays. Harris's early aspirations included being a doctor or a movie star, although she was encouraged to teach. She then attended Monroe Colored High School, and during that time, most of her activities were centered at St. James United Methodist Church. She transferred to Carroll High School where she played

basketball and learned to defend herself when a classmate made snide comments about her family. She also worked as an accountant for a local cotton business, which revealed to her the economic exploitation of African American workers. Harris's parents insisted on her attending college, and she entered Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge in 1956. While there, she participated in multiple demonstrations including a sit-in at S. H. Kress & Co. Department Store, where she and seven classmates were arrested and jailed.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Louisiana--Monroe.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American children--Social life and customs.

African American families--Louisiana--Monroe.

African American neighborhoods--Louisiana--Monroe.

African Americans--Louisiana--Monroe--Social life and customs.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Southern University and A & M College--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Janette Hoston Harris, Section A2004_122_001_003, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Janette Hoston Harris and fellow student protesters were released from jail shortly after their arrest for a sit-in protest at S. H. Kress & Co. Department Store in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Harris was expelled from Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College and barred by Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis from attending any state school. Harris transferred to Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio and graduated in 1962. While enrolled in Central State, she returned to Louisiana for court appearances and began a local NAACP youth chapter. The trial eventually culminated in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Garner v. Louisiana*, 1961. Harris moved to Washington, D.C. and, with Robert F. Kennedy's initial assistance, worked in the Peace Corps' for two years. Harris obtained her master's and Ph.D. in history from Howard University. She worked for the 1979 Carter/Mondale campaign, taught African American history at Federal City College in D.C. and worked for D.C. mayor HistoryMaker Sharon Pratt.

Southern University and A & M College--Students.

Civil rights demonstrations--Louisiana.

African American college students.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

African American neighborhoods--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

African American neighborhoods--Washington (D.C.).

Segregation.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Central State University (Wilberforce, Ohio)--Students.

Howard University--Students.

African American civil rights activists--Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Janette Hoston Harris, Section A2004_122_001_004, TRT: 0:26:56 ?

Janette Hoston Harris was appointed Washington D.C.'s city historian by HistoryMaker Marion Barry in the early 1990s. She began the Washington D.C.

Hall of Fame to recognize outstanding residents. She shares her perspective on D.C. history, its connection to African American history, and her goals as city historian. She reflects upon the impact of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954 at her high school alma mater and upon her sister's decision to attend Central State College in Ohio. Harris returned to Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College for its 2004 commencement, and was belatedly recognized for her contributions to civil rights during her time there. Harris reflects upon the importance of history, her life and legacy, and the activism of younger generations. Harris describes how she would like to be remembered and her hopes for the African American community. She and her husband are currently active at John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church and other organizations in D.C.

African American educators--Washington (D.C.).

African American mayors--Washington (D.C.).

African American neighborhoods--Washington (D.C.).

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Barry, Marion, 1936-.

Woodson, Carter Godwin, 1875-1950.

African American businesspeople.

African Americans and libraries.

African American historians.

Video Oral History Interview with Janette Hoston Harris, Section A2004_122_001_005, TRT: 0:14:27 ?

Janette Hoston Harris narrates her photographs.