

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Avis LaVelle

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: | LaVelle, Avis, 1954- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, |
| Dates: | August 11, 2004, August 11, 2005 and August 23, 2010 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2004, 2005 and 2010 |
| Physical Description: | 8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:04:14). |
| Abstract: | Public relations executive Avis LaVelle (1954 -) served as the press secretary to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley; the National Press Secretary for Bill Clinton during his campaign for president; vice president of government and public affairs for the University of Chicago Hospitals; senior policy advisor for Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich; and vice president of communications for Waste Management. LaVelle is also the founder of A. LaVelle Consulting Services LLC. LaVelle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2004, August 11, 2005 and August 23, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2004_123 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Avis LaVelle was born in Chicago, Illinois, on March 5, 1954. After graduating from Englewood High School, LaVelle attended the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, where she first started out majoring in physical education, but

later changed her major to broadcasting. LaVelle later earned her master's degree in business administration from the Keller School of Management at DeVry University.

After graduating from the University of Illinois, LaVelle worked at a radio station in Springfield, Illinois. Moving to Chicago, LaVelle continued her climb in the communications world, and by the early 1990s, she was serving as press secretary to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. In 1992, LaVelle was picked by Bill Clinton to serve as his National Press Secretary during his campaign for president. Returning to Chicago after Clinton's presidency, LaVelle held a number of positions both in the government and the private sector. LaVelle served as the vice president of government and public affairs for the University of Chicago Hospitals; senior policy advisor for Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich; and vice president of communications for Waste Management.

In 1997, LaVelle was appointed by Mayor Daley to the School Reform Board of Trustees, and in 1999, she served as his campaign manager while he successfully ran for reelection. LaVelle retired from the School Reform Board in 2003, and went on to serve on the board of the Chicago Cable Commission, and as a private consultant with her company, A. LaVelle Consulting Services LLC. In 2004 LaVelle was hired by the John Kerry-John Edwards 2004 presidential ticket to serve as Illinois campaign manager.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Avis LaVelle was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 11, 2004, August 11, 2005 and August 23, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Public relations executive Avis LaVelle (1954 -) served as the press secretary to Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley; the National Press Secretary for Bill Clinton during his campaign for president; vice president of government and public affairs for the University of Chicago Hospitals; senior policy advisor for Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich; and vice president of communications for Waste Management. LaVelle is also the founder of A. LaVelle Consulting Services LLC.

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:

LaVelle, Avis, 1954-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

LaVelle, Avis, 1954---Interviews

African American political consultants--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Image consultants--Interviews

Public relations consultants--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Public Relations Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Avis LaVelle, August 11, 2004, August 11, 2005 and August 23, 2010. 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 Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00 2004/08/11

Avis LaVelle was born on March 5, 1954 in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother, Mai Hicks Patton, was born in Kentucky but grew up on the South Side of Chicago. Her maternal ancestors were from Mississippi and she describes her cousin encountering a potential descendant of their long lost great great uncle. Patton married LaVelle's father, Adolph Sampson, at the age of seventeen. Sampson was a sheet metal worker born in Little Rock, Arkansas. He was abandoned by his mother, who ran off with a white man, and his father at a young age. His older sister went to live with relatives in Chicago, but Sampson was taken in by a moonshiner and began drinking at the age of seven. As a teenager, he found his sister in Chicago, but she rejected him. He was an alcoholic and died of the disease. LaVelle and her siblings grew up in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. The community transitioned from predominantly white to predominantly African American within the first five years of LaVelle's life.

African American political consultants--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Image consultants--Interviews.

Public relations consultants--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2004/08/11

Avis LaVelle grew up in a home with her parents, siblings and maternal grandparents in the Englewood community of Chicago, Illinois. Growing up she went grocery shopping with her maternal grandfather, swam in Ogden Park, worked in department stores and took the bus to see her friends in neighboring communities. She attended Christ Methodist Church where HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Kwame John R. Porter was the pastor during her childhood. LaVelle attended Perkins Bass, Joshua D. Kershaw and George Gershwin Elementary Schools because the city kept changing the school boundaries. She attended Juliette G. Lowe Upper Grade Center for junior high and Englewood High School where she was in an advanced program with excellent teachers. LaVelle remembers the difficulty of growing up with an alcoholic father, who died when she was twenty-four. Her mother later remarried. LaVelle describes her first broadcasting job as a radio disc jockey in Springfield, Illinois where she played music from her parents' generation.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 2004/08/11

Avis LaVelle liked to read the newspaper and watch 'American Bandstand' on TV growing up in Chicago, Illinois. At Englewood High school, she was very athletic and a school leader. She took African dance classes with HistoryMaker Darlene Blackburn at the Urban Progress Center and reflects upon how it helped her connect with her identity as an African American in the late 1960s. After graduating in 1971, LaVelle followed in her sister's footsteps and attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. She entered U of I as a physical education major, but switched to radio and television broadcasting, which was her boyfriend's major. LaVelle enjoyed college, but lacked mentors. After

graduation, they moved to Dayton, Ohio and LaVelle could not find work in broadcasting. She moved to Springfield, Illinois after being offered a job as a radio disc jockey. LaVelle left the job after her home was burglarized; she describes the lessons she learned from that experience.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_002_004, TRT: 0:27:50 2005/08/11

Avis LaVelle attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois in the early 1970s, after the high tide of campus activism in the late 1960s. She began as a physical education major, but switched to radio and television broadcasting due to her interest in media. LaVelle excelled academically and was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She graduated in three and a half years and returned to Chicago, Illinois where she taught speech and persuasive writing at the Office of Special Programs-College Prep at the University of Chicago with HistoryMaker Larry Hawkins before taking an opportunity to move to Dayton, Ohio, where LaVelle hoped she could realize her goal of becoming a radio disc jockey. After being unable to accomplish her goal in Dayton, she moved to Springfield, Illinois when she was offered a job as a radio disc jockey. At the small station, LaVelle was also the public affairs director. She left Springfield after her home was burglarized.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_002_005, TRT: 0:29:20 2005/08/11

Avis LaVelle describes briefly working for NCR Corporation in Dayton, Ohio. After leaving Springfield, Illinois, LaVelle found a job in radio in Gary, Indiana as a news reporter, which eventually led to a job in Chicago, Illinois working for a couple radio stations; then working as a street reporter and finally being recruited to work for WGN AM radio in Chicago. LaVelle eventually had her own political radio show on WGN and was a reporter for their TV station on the weekends. She describes being a news reporter in Chicago in the 1980s, covering stories like Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's election in 1983, his death in 1987, the conflict between HistoryMaker Eugene Sawyer and Timothy C. Evans,

Tylenol tampering and the first DNA case. In 1988, LaVelle was recruited by Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley to serve as press secretary for his first mayoral campaign. She describes the meeting she had with Daley before agreeing to work with him, and public opinion of him during at the time.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_002_006, TRT: 0:29:40 2005/08/11

Avis LaVelle explains how the Chicago, Illinois City Council operates and talks about the Council Wars between Edward Vrdolyak and Chicago Mayor Harold Washington in the late 1980s. LaVelle became Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley's press secretary in 1989. She explains the different perspectives reporters and press secretaries take on the news cycle. LaVelle knew David Axelrod from their time as reporters and advisors to Daley. Axelrod recruited her to be national press secretary for President Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. She recounts meeting Bill and Hillary Clinton for the first time and her impressions of their personalities. LaVelle remembers the presidential race between Clinton and former President George H. W. Bush and comments on Clinton's transition into the White House, which was made difficult by the outdated technology at the White House. LaVelle was appointed executive assistant to HistoryMaker Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. on Clinton's Transition Committee.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_003_007, TRT: 0:29:12 2010/08/23

Avis LaVelle served on President Bill Clinton's Transition Committee as executive assistant to HistoryMaker Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. where she summarized citizen concerns to be added to the president's agenda. In 1993, she became assistant secretary for public affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) where she focused on public education of issues like organ allocation, birth control and immunization. Spreading immunization awareness meant working with pediatricians, child advocacy and medical organizations to educate parents about the importance of immunizing their children. In 1995, moved back to Chicago, Illinois to care

for her parents and worked for Waste Management as vice president of communications, focusing on the blue bag recycling program. In 1997, she began working for the University of Chicago Hospitals where she had many roles, all focused on improving the hospital's relationship with community around it. LaVelle left that job after her mother's death in 2000.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis LaVelle, Section
A2004_123_003_008, TRT: 0:40:32 2010/08/23

Avis LaVelle served on the School Reform Board of Trustees in Chicago, Illinois. In 1999, she served as Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley's campaign manager when he ran against HistoryMaker The Honorable Bobby Rush. LaVelle later worked for IT firm Foster Group Inc. In 2004, she lost her job due to the downturn in the technology sector and began working solely as a consultant through her company A. LaVelle Consulting. One of her first jobs was as Illinois campaign manager for John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004. She found the experience frustrating because national campaign did not allocate money for Illinois. LaVelle talks about HistoryMaker President Barack Obama's first presidential campaign and his administration. LaVelle describes her parents' opinion of her success, how she met her husband and her hopes for the African American community. She reflects upon her life, her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.