

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sylvia Cooke Martin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Martin, Sylvia Cooke, 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin,
Dates:	October 18, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:48:15).
Abstract:	Historian and library administrator Sylvia Cooke Martin (1938 -) was appointed as the Chief of Staff Training and Development by the Library of Congress, thereafter serving as the McNair Scholars Program coordinator at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Martin is also the past project manager and CEO of the Ellicott City Colored School Restoration Project. Martin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 18, 2004, in Columbia, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_210
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian and genealogist Clara Sylvia Cooke Martin was born on May 2, 1938 in Baltimore, Maryland. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a pharmaceutical technician. At the age of sixteen, her father died and her mother took a job as an elevator operator to help care for Martin and her siblings. In 1955, Martin earned her high school diploma from Frederick Douglas High School, where she was active with the student council, honor society and school paper. From 1955 until 1957, Martin attended the University of Maryland where she was among the first group of African American students permitted to live in the campus dormitories.

Between 1963 and 1966, Martin worked for the Social Security Administration, starting as a file clerk and quickly moving her way through the ranks. Her initiative and hard work was recognized by personnel, earning her a position as a health insurance intern for Medicare in 1966. Martin was one of ten interns selected nationwide from a pool of more than 700 applicants. While an intern, she served on President Lyndon B. Johnson's Conference on Medicare and Medicaid.

Returning to the Social Security Administration, Martin then worked as a manpower development specialist from 1967 until 1968, performing recruitment, staffing and counseling duties for prospective job seekers. From 1968 until 1970, she worked as a management intern for the department designing and implementing procedures for Social Security Upward Mobility programs. In 1970, Martin was promoted to senior career development specialist, a position she held until 1978. During this time, she also returned to school, completing her studies at Maryland and earning her B.S. degree in 1972 in economics. In 1978, Martin received her master's degree in policy science from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. From 1975 until 1979, she served on the faculty at Antioch College. In 1978, Martin was hired as the chief of staff training and development for the Library of Congress, where she developed and designed educational programs for approximately 5000 employees. She remained in that

post until 1993. From 1994 until 1999, Martin worked as the McNair Scholars Program Coordinator at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. From 1997 until 2002 she was project manager and later CEO of the Ellicott City Colored School Restoration Project, the first school for blacks in Maryland built with state and county funds.

Martin has been the recipient of numerous awards for her civic and civil rights contributions. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, NAACP and the Oral History Association. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, writing poetry and designing wedding paraphernalia.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on October 18, 2004, in Columbia, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Historian and library administrator Sylvia Cooke Martin (1938 -) was appointed as the Chief of Staff Training and Development by the Library of Congress, thereafter serving as the McNair Scholars Program coordinator at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Martin is also the past project manager and CEO of the Ellicott City Colored School Restoration Project.

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:

Martin, Sylvia Cooke, 1938-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Martin, Sylvia Cooke, 1938---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Library of Congress

Occupations:

Historian

Library Administrator

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 Sylvia Cooke Martin, October 18, 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 Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin was born on May 2, 1938 in Baltimore, Maryland. She traces her paternal family history to an enslaved ancestor born in Virginia in 1798. Her paternal grandparents were Laura Quarles Cook and John Cook. Some of Martin's maternal ancestors, the Coppers, worked on one of the Lloyd Plantations in Maryland. Her other maternal ancestors, the Dixons, were free blacks in Caroline County, Maryland. Her maternal grandparents were Clara Copper Evans and Harrison Evans. Martin recounts stories of slavery, sharecropping, passing and land ownership from her family history. Her mother, Clara Marie Evans Cook, who was born in Baltimore, was a homemaker who enjoyed sewing. Martin's father, Emanuel Cook, was born in Newport News, Virginia and raised in Baltimore. Martin's parents met as students at Baltimore's Douglass High School. Her father later worked as a chemical technician at Hynson, Westcott, and Dunning, which made penicillin and Mercurochrome during World War II.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin's paternal grandfather, John Cook, migrated from Blackstone, Virginia to Baltimore, Maryland in 1914 where he worked as a stevedore on the waterfront. He later purchased a home and married Martin's grandmother, Laura Quarles Cook, a light-skinned woman with whom he had ten children. Martin describes her relationship with her paternal grandparents as well as her memories of "wash day" and the holidays in their home. Martin and her three brothers were raised in Baltimore's McCulloh Homes housing project, which was near the NAACP's Baltimore headquarters as well as the York Hotel, the only hotel for blacks in the city. As a child, Martin recalls catching glimpses of Thurgood Marshall and Walter White as well as the York Hotel's clientele including the Baltimore Elite Giants, Little Richard, and Dinah Washington. Martin received her first library card at the age of four, and was a regular visitor to the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin describes the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood in the McCulloh Homes of Baltimore, Maryland. She attended Highland Garnet Elementary School where she had many memorable teachers. Martin was a serious young girl who enjoyed playing with paper dolls and was an avid reader. While a student at Booker T. Washington Junior High School in Baltimore, she was taught by Enolia Millan, who became the first female president of the NAACP. The school's assistant principal, Annette Colbert Johnson, was the founder of The Pierians, Inc. Martin describes her early awareness of class differences between herself and her peers, and her dream of becoming a journalist. She talks about her experience at Frederick Douglass High School where she enrolled in the commercial curriculum; her father passed away during her senior year. In 1955, Martin received a scholarship from Marvin Mandel to

attend the University of Maryland in College Park in 1955; she was one of six black students living on campus.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_004, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin describes a school administrator's response to her experience of sexual harassment at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland in 1955. As an undergraduate, she married Donald Martin, had two children, and also began her career at the Social Security Administration (SSA); she did not receive her bachelor's degree until 1972. Martin began working as a file clerk in the SSA in 1963 and became a management intern for the SSA's Medicare program in 1966. When she left the organization in 1972, Martin was a GS-13, and a recipient of the Commissioner's Citation, the SSA's highest honor. Martin describes her interest in personnel management and the significance of her undergraduate education. She went on to conduct graduate studies at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County before joining the Library of Congress in 1978. Martin also addresses her divorce and the political climate of Baltimore during the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_005, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin joined the Library of Congress as the staff development officer in 1978 where she examined slave narratives, created programming for patrons, and met librarians and archivists from around the world. The library's extensive African American records include the papers of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. Martin's interest in genealogy developed after meeting a distant relative in Moscow, Russia around 1977, the same year of her brother's death. She left the Library of Congress in 1993 to work with the McNair Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Martin talks about the availability of African American history as well as politics in the black community. She also describes her role in restoring Ellicott City Colored School, a historical landmark which functions as a living museum and research center. Martin reflects upon her legacy, her values, her regrets, and how she would like to be remembered. She also describes her children and motherhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvia Cooke Martin, Section A2004_210_001_006, TRT: 0:16:40 ?

Sylvia Cooke Martin narrates her photographs.