

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Patricia Mell

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Mell, Patricia, 1953-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 15, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:31).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Academic administrator Patricia Mell (1953 - ) was the first woman and first African American dean of the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. Mell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_264
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

John Marshall Law School Dean Patricia Mell was born December 15, 1953 in Cleveland, Ohio. Her father, Julian Cooper Mell, was one of Cleveland's first black homicide detectives and her mother, Thelma Webb Mell, was a school principal. Mell attended Doan Elementary School on the East Side. She graduated from Collinwood High School in 1971. Mell chose Wellesley College and graduated with an A.B. degree with honors in 1975. Going immediately to Case Western Reserve Law School, she earned a J.D. in 1978.

Mell worked for the Ohio Attorney General's Office as a trial lawyer and assistant attorney general in the Regulatory Division from 1975 to 1982. She was the corporation counsel for the Ohio Secretary of State from 1982 to 1984. At Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio Mell served as visiting assistant professor in 1984 and 1985. She was assistant professor at University of Toledo Law School and associate professor at Widener University by 1986. In 1989, Mell participated in the Economics for Law Professors, George Mason University Program at Dartmouth. Mell joined the legal firm of Lewis, White and Clay in Detroit in 1991 and taught as an adjunct at Wayne State University. Joining the faculty of the Michigan State University – Detroit College of Law in 1992, Mell was associate dean for academic affairs from 1998 to 2001. She was visiting professor at the University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law before her appointment as dean of John Marshall Law School in Chicago in 2003. Mell is the first woman and first African American dean in the school's 104-year history.

Mell's expertise lies in the area of criminal law, the legal aspects of commerce, corporations and partnerships. Interested in privacy and computers and constitutional rights she has written about the U.S. Patriot Act. Mell also authored a textbook entitled *Criminal Law: Cases, Commentary and Questions* (2005). Married to Dr. Michael Ragland, Mell has three stepchildren.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Patricia Mell was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 15, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator Patricia Mell (1953 - ) was the first woman and first African American dean of the John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Mell, Patricia, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Mell, Patricia, 1953---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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John Marshall Law School (Chicago, Ill.)

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## Occupations:

Law School Dean

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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## 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 Patricia Mell, December 15, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Patricia Mell was born on December 15, 1953 in Cleveland, Ohio to Thelma Webb Mell and Julian Mell. Both parents came from well-to-do African American families who moved to Cleveland to escape racially motivated violence in the South. Mell's mother's family left Trenton, Tennessee after her great-grandfather was likely murdered in retribution for his successful pharmacy and wealth. Her paternal family fled Anniston, Alabama after her great-grandmother accidentally stepped on a white man's shoe, which ignited a fight. Her mother was an elementary school teacher and principal in Cleveland. Her

father, artistic and mechanically inclined, became the first black homicide detective for the Cleveland Police Department. Her parents began dating when her mother was in college and her father was in the U.S. Marines. While growing up in Cleveland with her two brothers, Mell's community and family insulated her from segregation. At Doan Elementary School, she received a strong education and exposure to culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Patricia Mell loved school and was encouraged to excel at the segregated Doan Elementary School in Cleveland, Ohio. Upon desegregation, Mell was bused to Collinwood High School, where she witnessed race riots. Her early career aspiration was to be a journalist, so she joined the student newspaper and became editor as well as participating in the choir, language and history clubs. Mell watched her father testify in court as a homicide detective, sparking an interest in law, which was further facilitated by a meeting with Judge Jean Murrell Capers. As a teenager, the riots in her neighborhood, Hough, deeply troubled her and prompted long talks with her parents who encouraged her to find a way to make a meaningful impact on society. Mell attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts, where she double majored in political science and French and German modern languages. A few failed attempts to secure internships at major newspapers led Mell to return home to attend Case Western Reserve University School of Law.

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

Patricia Mell found a supportive community of African American students at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland, Ohio. After graduating in 1978, she worked at the Ohio attorney general's office, focusing on charitable foundations and consumer protection. She became a legal administrator for the Ohio secretary of state, which gave her expertise in managing a legal office. After a visiting professorship at Capital University Law School in Columbus, Ohio, she joined the law school faculty at University of Toledo in Ohio. In 1986, she became associate professor at Widener University Delaware Law School in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1991, she moved to Detroit, Michigan, where she taught at Detroit College of Law and became a docent for The Detroit Institute of Arts. Having written a tenure piece on the PATRIOT Act, Mell shares her thoughts about the impact of this legislation and her concerns about voting rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Patricia Mell taught at Michigan State University College of Law in East Lansing, Michigan for eleven years. Ready for a change, she applied for, and was selected, associate dean of academic affairs. In 2003, she was hired as the dean of The John Marshall Law School in Chicago, Illinois, becoming the second African American woman to head a predominately white college in the United States. Her mother, who was battling cancer at the time, encouraged Mell through the interview process; although she died before Mell was instated as dean, she was proud of her accomplishments. When Mell began as dean, The John Marshall Law School was facing challenges, such as increasing the number of students passing the bar exam. Under her tenure, Mell implemented programs to improve the bar passage rate and hire quality faculty. Her future goals for the law school include hiring more renowned faculty and expanding the campus. Mell recounts an amusing story about her furniture being damaged during her move to Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_001\_005, TRT: 0:25:40 ?

Patricia Mell, in her academic law career, has found it challenging to prepare

law students for the impact of the Internet's dissemination of legal information. Although the proliferation of legal documents online has led to a decrease in hiring lawyers for common tasks like creating a will, globalization has created a demand for law students familiar with international law. In this part of the interview, Mell shares her thoughts and concerns about the trend in the United States of trying juvenile offenders as adults rather than focusing on rehabilitation. Mell talks about the presence of African Americans in the legal profession, noting the need for increasing the number in management positions at law firms. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and her effort to uphold her mother and grandmother's legacy through her career. She also reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Patricia Mell, Section A2004\_264\_Mell\_Patricia\_06\_MED\_002, TRT: