

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Veronica Airey-Wilson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Airey-Wilson, Veronica, 1953-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson,
Dates:	February 17, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:10).
Abstract:	City council member Veronica Airey-Wilson (1953 -) sits on the Hartford, Connecticut Court of Common Council, where she was the first Jamaican to serve as the city's deputy mayor. She is also the owner of the Airey-Wilson Insurance Group, a full service financial agency. Airey-Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 17, 2005, in Hartford, Connecticut. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_052
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

City council member Veronica Airey-Wilson, former deputy mayor of Hartford, Connecticut, was born on August 4, 1953, in Kingston, Jamaica, to Narciso and Clariana Airey. Moving to Hartford in 1960, Airey-Wilson attended both Brackett Elementary School and Arsenal Elementary School. Airey-Wilson was a member of the National Honor Society and captain of the cheerleading team at Weaver High School from which she graduated in 1972. Attending Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York on a full scholarship, Airey-Wilson graduated in 1975.

In 1976, Airey-Wilson was hired by Aetna where she rose from claims adjuster to equal employment opportunity counselor. Leaving Aetna in 1985, Airey-Wilson started her own business, Verjen Boutique, in Hartford's Richardson Mall; she later returned to the insurance business by opening an AllState Insurance Company franchise, which eventually became the Airey-Wilson Insurance Group, a full service financial agency.

In 1994, Airey-Wilson was elected to the Hartford Court of Common Council, where she was the first Jamaican to serve as the city's deputy mayor; in 2003, she served as co-chair of the Youth Workforce Development Task Force. Airey-Wilson has served as an executive member of the Capital Region Council of Government Joint Policy Steering Committee; chair of the Republican State Convention; and an executive member of the Capital Region Council of Government Joint Policy Board. Airey-Wilson was vice president of the Association of Caribbean American Leaders and a member of the NAACP. In addition to her professional activities, Airey-Wilson has raised two children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 17, 2005,

in Hartford, Connecticut, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member Veronica Airey-Wilson (1953 -) sits on the Hartford, Connecticut Court of Common Council, where she was the first Jamaican to serve as the city's deputy mayor. She is also the owner of the Airey-Wilson Insurance Group, a full service financial agency.

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:

Airey-Wilson, Veronica, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Airey-Wilson, Veronica, 1953---Interviews

African American politicians--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Hartford (Conn.). Court of Common Council

Occupations:

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Veronica Airey-Wilson, February 17, 2005. 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 Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson was born in Kingston, Jamaica on August 4th, 1953. Her mother, Clariana Knight-Airey, was born in Maryland, Jamaica to a father who worked in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and a mother who was a farm laborer. She may have been descended from the Carib tribe as well as the revolutionary Paul Bogle. During her youth in Jamaica, she worked as a higgler. Airey-Wilson's father, Narciso Airey, was born in Honduras. His father was a baker there, but he lost his life savings when his house was burned during an uprising against foreigners, and he returned to Jamaica to found a bread company. Airey split his time between Jamaica and Hartford, Connecticut, where he was a seasonal farm worker, in the 1940s and 1950s. Airey-Wilson's parents married in 1953 after her mother became pregnant with her. She lived in Jamaica from 1953 to 1960, where she was mistreated by a temporary guardian while her mother was away, received American toys as gifts from her father and often ate ackee, Jamaica's national fruit.

African American politicians--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson was often cared for by neighbors in Kingston, Jamaica while her mother traveled to sell produce. When Airey-Wilson and her family moved to Hartford, Connecticut, she attended Brackett Northeast School where she and her younger brother were teased for their polite mannerisms and shoddy clothing. Airey-Wilson's family attended St. Monica's Episcopal Church in Hartford. Her father often hosted late night parties in their home, for which Airey-Wilson was in charge of selecting the jazz and calypso music; her mother had to work part-time when she was unable to obtain childcare, but once her children were older, she began working full-time. During elementary school, Airey-Wilson's family moved to a poorer neighborhood, where her father managed an apartment building to save money for a new home. Airey-Wilson talks about the work ethic of her immigrant parents and the challenges West Indians face when immigrating to the U.S. while unfamiliar with its particular history of racism and segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson attended elementary school, first at Brackett Northeast School, and then Arsenal School, in Hartford, Connecticut. She enjoyed math, but disliked her third grade teacher who did not discourage her classmates' taunts. Her seventh grade teacher, Jessica Moses, built Airey-Wilson's self-esteem by giving her a starring role in 'A Raisin in the Sun.' Airey-Wilson attended Weaver High School where she bent her parents' rules by not coming straight home after school, captained the cheerleading squad and participated in a work study program. Difficulties getting a visa due to her Jamaican passport almost kept her from a school trip to Europe, but eventually she was able to visit Rhodes and Athens in Greece. She received a full scholarship to Ithaca College in New York, where she majored in history and political science and planned to go to law school. She somewhat regretted not attending Cornell University, where she was also accepted, and where she took several African American history courses.

Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson graduated from Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York in 1975, and joined Aetna, Inc. in Hartford, Connecticut as a claims rep in 1976. She was promoted to a job investigating discrimination complaints by women and minorities under Lynne MacFarlane. After nine years at Aetna, Airey-Wilson and her cousin opened Verjen Boutique to sell jewelry specializing in African styles, which grew to locations in two cities before going out of business in the economic crash of the late 1980s. She entered the insurance sales business as the owner and operator of an Allstate franchise, for which her customer base was her business contacts and fellow West Indians. Airey-Wilson joined an organization concerned with gaining political representation for those of Caribbean descent and African Americans. In 1990, they persuaded her to run for the Hartford City Council. Her political mentor, Reverend Collin Bennett, convinced her to run as a Republican after the local Democratic Party snubbed her candidacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_005, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson was elected to a seat on the Hartford Court of Common Council in 1991. She subsequently allied with Michael P. Peters in his successful independent campaign against incumbent Carrie Saxon Perry for mayor of Hartford, Connecticut in 1993, which led to a Republican majority on the council for the first time in decades. She formed a similar alliance with Eddie Perez, Hartford's first Hispanic mayor, in 2001. Airey-Wilson's efforts on the council included attempts to scale back welfare programs, the creation of a loan program for homeownership called House Hartford, and the improvement of the city's relationship with the business community, including enhanced job training for residents. Although she worked to reduce gang violence, she felt that the city was unable to address recidivism among black men due to a lack of federal aid. Airey-Wilson reflects on African Americans' flight from the Republican Party in the 1960s and whether Great Society era welfare programs helped black people.

Video Oral History Interview with Veronica Airey-Wilson, Section A2005_052_001_006, TRT: 0:24:40 ?

Veronica Airey-Wilson, who was the longest serving member of the Court of Common Council in Hartford, Connecticut as of 2005, served on the finance, revenue and budget committees on the council to advocate for fiscally conservative government spending. She was picked to chair the Connecticut Republicans State Convention by Governor John Rowland in 2002. Airey-Wilson was a member of the all-women Rose of Sharon chapter of the Independent United Order of Mechanics, an organization that both of her parents had joined as well. In this part of the interview, Airey-Wilson shares her pride in representing and shaping the moderate wing of Connecticut's Republican Party and her aspirations to be elected to state or national legislatures. Airey-Wilson describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. She reflects on her life, legacy, and her strong bond with her parents and her two children.