

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cora Masters Barry

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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>	Barry, Cora Masters, 1945-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 16, 2012 and May 6, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005 and 2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:17:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civic leader Cora Masters Barry (1945 - ) is the former First Lady of the City of Washington, D.C. Barry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 16, 2012 and May 6, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_121
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Cora Masters Barry, Chief Executive Officer of the Recreation Wish List Committee, former University of the District of Columbia political science professor and former First Lady of the city of Washington, D.C., was born May 7, 1945 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She was raised there, along with her three sisters and two brothers, by her mother, Isabell Arch Masters. Masters Barry's mother had separated from her father, Alfred Masters, when Masters Barry was young. The family moved to Pasadena, California during Masters Barry's teenage years, and after high school she attended California State and Texas Southern universities. Masters Barry moved to Washington, D.C. in 1970, with her then-husband Moses Wilds and her two daughters, to work towards a master's degree at

Howard University. In Washington, D.C., Masters Barry began her career with community projects in Anacostia and in Shaw, where she worked as a counselor for teenage girls with Operation Sisters United. She met Marion Barry in 1971 at a political function and in 1976 she began teaching at the University of the District of Columbia. During Barry's bids for city council, and again in 1978, during his successful bid for mayor, Masters Barry campaigned for Marion Barry.

In 1980, Mayor Barry appointed her as the first woman on the three-member D.C. Boxing and Wrestling Commission. She became chairman after her first three-year term, and left the position in 1988.

Masters Barry and Marion Barry were married in 1994 and together they launched his mayoral comeback. Barry was re-elected in 1994 and served until 1998.

After her service as Washington D.C.'s First Lady, Masters Barry started the nonprofit foundation, the Recreation Wish List, serving as its Chief Executive Officer. The organization built the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center where urban youth in Washington, D.C. learn about tennis. Masters Barry and former Mayor Barry divorced in 2003.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Cora Masters Barry was conducted by Evelyn Pounds and Larry Crowe on June 16, 2012 and May 6, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic leader Cora Masters Barry (1945 - ) is the former First Lady of the City of Washington, D.C.

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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

## 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:

Barry, Cora Masters, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Barry, Cora Masters, 1945---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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## **Occupations:**

Civic Leader

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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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 Cora Masters Barry, June 16, 2012 and May 6, 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 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).

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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 Cora Masters Barry, Section  
A2005\_121\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:20 2005/05/06

Cora Masters Barry was born on May 7, 1945 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Her mother, Isabell Masters, was born on January 9, 1913 in Oklahoma. Isabell Masters spent her childhood in Oklahoma City and Topeka, Kansas. Barry talks about her maternal great-grandparents' migration west. One set of grandparents left Texas and moved to Kansas as part of the Exodus of 1879. The other set fled Montgomery, Alabama for Oklahoma. Barry's father, Alfred Masters, was born in Oklahoma, and enlisted in the U.S. Marines in World War II. Barry describes her father's experience with racism in the Marine Corps. Barry's parents met at Langston University in Oklahoma. When Barry was four or five years old, Barry's mother moved the family to Los Angeles, California. Her mother took pride in blockbusting and Barry was raised in a series of predominantly white suburbs of Los Angeles. Comedian Tim Moore of 'Amos 'n' Andy' was a neighbor. She describes her experience at Cienega Elementary and William A. Diggs Elementary in Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section  
A2005\_121\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:40 2005/05/06

Cora Masters Barry describes her neighbor, comedian Tim Moore who played Kingfish on the 'Amos 'n' Andy' show. Barry was raised in a predominantly white neighborhood in Pasadena, California. She attended Samuel Gompers Middle School in South Central, California and Washington Junior High in Pasadena where the student body was racially diverse, but only 10 percent African American. Barry attended three high schools: John Muir in Pasadena, Manual Arts in Los Angeles, California, and Paseo Academy High School in Kansas City, Missouri in

1961. At all of the schools, though integrated, the student activities and social life were segregated. Barry graduated from Peso Academy in 1962, and enrolled briefly at Pasadena City College in California where she did poorly. In 1964, her mother sent her to Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. She partied a lot at Lincoln University and left prematurely for a job as a teacher's assistant in California's Head Start pilot program.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:01 2005/05/06

Cora Masters Barry describes her first semester at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas including the influence of black-nationalism, the 1968 on-campus shooting of unarmed students that ended in the death of a police officer, and the atmosphere after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot. After graduating from TSU in 1969, Barry moved to Hayward, California to attend the University of California East Bay. She talks about the Black Power Movement in Northern California, the arrest of Black Panther chief of staff David Hilliard in 1969 and anti-war demonstrations in Berkley, California between 1968 and 1969. Barry moved to Washington, D.C. and earned her M.A. degree in urban policy from Howard University in 1972. Barry joined HistoryMaker Walter Fauntroy's congressional campaign in 1971, where she first met HistoryMaker Marion Barry. Barry worked with the National Council of Negro Women, and on Marion Barry's campaign for the Washington D.C. school board.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:40 2005/05/06

Cora Masters Barry talks about the election of HistoryMaker Walter Fauntroy as the delegate-elect for Washington D.C. congressional representation in 1971 and explains the Home Rule Act of 1973 which gave the people of D.C. the power to elect their local politicians. In 1974, she was the coordinator for the committee to draft HistoryMaker Marion Barry for chairman of Washington D.C. city council and was active in his later mayoral campaigns. In 1976, Barry began teaching political science at the University of the District of Columbia, and

was hired as the northern Virginia minority coordinator for President Jimmy Carter's reelection campaign in 1980. Barry first became interested in boxing when she organized a boxing fundraiser for the maintenance of athletic programs in Washington D.C.'s public schools. In 1980, Marion Barry, then mayor of D.C., appointed her to the District of Columbia's Boxing and Wrestling Commission. Her nomination was controversial.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:50 2005/05/06

Cora Masters Barry talks about her controversial nomination to the District of Columbia Boxing and Wrestling Commission where she was sworn in as chairman in 1975. She talks about her tenure as chairman, as well as her first weigh-in, where she was made to sit behind a screen because she was female. Barry talks about regulating recuperation periods for fighters with the development of The Passport, a document that granted injured boxers permission to fight. She describes an interaction with Joe Frazier and his son Marvis Frazier. She also talks about the court proceedings surrounding a 1988 allegation that accused her of "double-dipping;" and being paid for her travel by both the city of D.C. and the International Boxing Federation. Barry talks about female officials in boxing, and about her involvement and contributions to the International Boxing Federation. She talks about HistoryMaker Marion Barry's tenure as mayor; and the evolution of her relationship with Barry, which led to their marriage in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_002\_006, TRT: 6:30:52 2012/06/16

Cora Masters Barry married HistoryMaker Marion Barry in 1994. Barry ran a voter registration drive for Marion Barry's 1994 re-election campaign and chaired his inaugural committee. Barry describes her experience as first lady of Washington, D.C. and explains the founding of the Recreation Wish List Committee, a fundraising organization for the maintenance and preservation of D.C. recreational facilities. She talks about its early supporters including Mayor William "Bill" McSweeney and Velma Nellum, how she conceived of the idea for the Southeast

Tennis and Learning Center, and its first phase of development, including consulting an architect and securing a pro bono lawyer and banking institution. She also talks about the involvement of John Tydings, former Greater Washington Board of Trade president, and the selection of a design team. The Southeast Tennis and Learning Center opened in Southeast Washington D.C. on April 22, 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_002\_007, TRT: 7:29:09 2012/06/16

Cora Masters Barry hosted an event to kickoff the capital campaign for the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center. She secured project developer Jennifer Coken for the Center's construction and worked on its unveiling ceremony which former first lady Hilary Clinton attended. Barry talks about how the Washington Tennis Foundation tried to block her fundraising efforts for the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center and how she secured \$100,000 in funding from Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and a generous contribution from former Washington D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams. The Southeast Tennis and Learning Center opened in Southeast Washington D.C. on April 22, 2001. Barry describes the educational and athletic programming that the center offers and the involvement of tennis players Venus and Serena Williams in her efforts.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_002\_008, TRT: 8:30:04 2012/06/16

Cora Masters Barry expresses her passion for the impact the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center makes on the poor community of Southeast Washington D.C. In 2009, she received an eviction notice from the office of Washington D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty, accusing Barry of failing to renew the corporate papers for the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center. Barry collaborated with HistoryMakers Dorothy Height and Maya Angelou to defend the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center. Other supporters included HistoryMaker Susan Taylor, Oracene Williams Price, and Marcia L. Dyson. The matter went to court and the court ruled in favor of the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center and the facility remained open. The



Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia Vincent C. Gray passed legislation stating that, if any nonprofit's corporate papers lapse, that they can be renewed without penalty. Barry talks about the importance of the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Cora Masters Barry, Section A2005\_121\_002\_009, TRT: 9:22:29 2012/06/16

Cora Masters Barry talks about the talented players at the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center and hosting the National Junior Tennis League tournament. The Center celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2011. Barry describes the social services available at the Center, the future of the organization and her church, Union Temple Baptist Church, in Washington, D.C. She also talks about her relationship with her daughters, former Mayor of Washington D.C. Marion Barry, and with her mother Isabell Masters. Isabell Masters ran for President of the United States four times. Barry describes an interaction between her mother and former United States president William "Bill" Clinton. Barry describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.