

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Xernona Clayton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Clayton, Xernona
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton,
Dates:	February 21, 2014 and June 22, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005 and 2014
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:46:26).
Abstract:	Civic leader Xernona Clayton (1930 -) was the founder of the Trumpet Awards, and the first black woman in the South to host a regularly scheduled prime-time talk show, <i>Variations</i> , which became <i>The Xernona Clayton Show</i> on WAGA-TV. Clayton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 21, 2014 and June 22, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_143
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Xernona Clayton and her twin sister, Xenobia, were born August 30, 1930 in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Clayton's parents, Reverend James M. and Lillie Brewster, were actively engaged in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Muskogee. In 1952, Clayton earned her B.A. degree from Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial College, now Tennessee State University. She later earned a scholarship and pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago. In 1957, Clayton married noted journalist and civil rights activist Edward Clayton, who died in 1966. She later married jurist Paul L. Brady, the first African American appointed as a Federal Administrative Law judge.

Clayton's civic involvement and participation in the Civil Rights Movement was informed by the Chicago Urban League, in which she worked to investigate discrimination in employment. As an activist, Clayton was instrumental in coordinating activities for the Doctor's Committee for Implementation project, which culminated with the desegregation of hospital facilities in Atlanta, Georgia. Clayton also worked closely with Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., helping to organize fundraising initiatives for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). By the mid-1960s, Clayton was writing for the *Atlanta Voice*, and in 1968, she became the first black woman in the South to host a regularly scheduled prime-time talk show, *Variations*, which became *The Xernona Clayton Show* on WAGA-TV in Atlanta. Her guests included Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne. Later that year, Clayton successfully convinced the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan to renounce the Klan. In 1982, Clayton began her long standing and impressive career with Turner Broadcasting System (TBS). At TBS, she assumed many roles throughout the years, including producing documentaries, hosting a public affairs program entitled *Open Up* and serving as director and vice-president of public affairs in the early 1980s. Ted Turner, founder of TBS, promoted Clayton to assistant corporate vice-president for urban affairs in 1988. In 1993, Clayton created the Trumpet Awards for Turner Broadcasting to honor African American achievements. The program is seen in over 185 countries.

As Governor of Georgia, former President Jimmy Carter appointed Clayton to the State Motion Picture and Television Commission. She is a member of the Academy for Television Arts and Sciences, the National Urban League, among other civic and professional organizations. Clayton is also a board member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and served as chairman of the Atlanta University Board of Trustees. The recipient of numerous accolades, Clayton received the Leadership and Dedication to Civil Rights Award and the Drum Major for Justice Award from SCLC in 2004. In her honor, the Atlanta Chapter of the Association of Black Journalists established the Xernona Clayton Scholarship. Clayton's autobiography, *I've Been Marching All the Time* was published in 1991.

Xernona Clayton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 22, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Xernona Clayton was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 21, 2014 and June 22, 2005, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic leader Xernona Clayton (1930 -) was the founder of the Trumpet Awards, and the first black woman in the South to host a regularly scheduled prime-time talk show, Variations, which became The Xernona Clayton Show on WAGA-TV.

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:

Clayton, Xernona

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Clayton, Xernona--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

African American executives--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

Clayton, Xernona--Interviews.

African American corporate executives.

African American television journalists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

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 Xernona Clayton, February 21, 2014 and June 22, 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 Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Xernona Clayton was born on August 30, 1930 in Muskogee, Oklahoma to Lillie Elliott Brewster and James Brewster. Her mother was born in 1902 in Mount Pleasant, Texas to a dark-skinned Native American woman who Clayton, as a child, considered mysterious. Clayton's mother met her father when he was a railroad porter on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas line. He was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, where his family owned land and worked in the timber industry. Though Brewster completed only a seventh grade education, he was highly regarded in Muskogee due to his work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, where he served as minister. Brewster encouraged his children to be self-reliant and competent and to strive for excellence. Clayton remarks on the lack of explicit racial dialogue in her childhood home, and considers how her father's ties to the Native American, African American and white local communities shaped the lessons he taught her as a child.

African American families--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

African American grandmothers.

African American fathers--Influence.

United States. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Muskogee Area Office.

Indians of North American--Politics and government.

Pullman porters.

Landowners--Louisiana--Shreveport.

African American families--Louisiana--Shreveport.

African American parents.

African American clergy--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

Indians--Mixed descent--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

African Americans--Relations with Indians.

Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_001_002, TRT: 0:26:30 ?

Xernona Clayton describes an early encounter with prejudice. Her father, who worked at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, admonished Native Americans with stereotypes that echoed those Clayton heard about blacks. As a child, Clayton also learned that being an identical twin attracted compliments, though her father's admonishment against valuing superficial aspects of herself influenced Clayton into adulthood. She participated in a University of Wisconsin study,

which found Clayton and her twin had mirror reactions yet opposite responses to the same stimuli. This aligned with Clayton's memory of her childhood. While her sister played outside with the boys, Clayton preferred to watch, not wanting to get dirty nor follow the crowd. These traits remained throughout her life. She was eager to learn at Dunbar Elementary School in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and recalls taking a rigorous algebra course simply because her peers were intimidated. Clayton remembers Sunday dinners and sounds of guests visiting her childhood home.

African American families--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

African American fathers--Influence.

United States. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Indians of North American--Politics and government.

Segregation in education--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

African American children--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Oklahoma--Muskogee.

Multiple Sclerosis--Psychological aspects.

University of Wisconsin.

Brothers and sisters--Death.

Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_002_003, TRT: 28:42:10 ?

Xernona Clayton received a strong educational foundation at Manual Training High School in Muskogee, Oklahoma. She remembers a thriving Oklahoman African American community in the midst of segregated schools and challenges facing rural teenagers. With her twin sister, Xenobia Clayton, she attended Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in Nashville, Tennessee, where family friend Dr. George Gore served as dean, and her godfather Henry Allen Boyd lived nearby. They were the first in their family to attend college, and Clayton recalls feeling embarrassed about their lack of familiarity with university culture. Clayton and her twin sister relied on their bond to thrive as undergraduates despite a school psychologist's suggestion that the two girls live separately and develop as individuals. She considers the way her adolescent experiences, including serving as choir director at her church, contributed to her organizational involvement and leadership style in adulthood.

Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_002_004, TRT: 4:26:27 ?

Xernona Clayton talks about the impact of her position in Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College's president's office on her professional development. She was the first African American chair of the intramural student association, comprised of seven local universities, and a member of the student religious academy and Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority. In Nashville, Clayton was largely sheltered from discrimination due to her family's relationship with Dean George Gore. She recalls in detail her relationship with her twin, Xenobia Brewster, especially their unique learning style, which was studied by researchers from the University of Wisconsin. Clayton did not have a favorite professor, but instead tended toward classes that other students regarded as difficult. Upon graduating with a degree in education in 1948, Clayton and her sister entered graduate school at University of Chicago. They obtained positions with the Chicago Urban League through contacts made during their undergraduate years.

Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_002_005, TRT: 5:26:28 ?

Xernona Clayton and her twin sister, Xenobia Brewster, worked to promote

equitable hiring practices through the Chicago Urban League, where they were mentored by leaders Louneer Pemberton and Leroy Jeffries. Clayton became the organization's most successful fundraiser after she hosted the comeback of singer and entertainer Joyce Bryant. She was so passionate about her work that she left graduate school. Clayton was active in Chicago's Hyde Park community and served on the South Side Community Art Center board. She was confidante to a wealthy Chicago businessman whom she taught to read and write and, eventually, to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King. Her involvement in Chicago society caught the attention of Edward Clayton, editor of Jet magazine. He offered to feature Clayton and her twin in the publication's center spread. Clayton refused, instead inviting her future husband to South Shore Baptist Church, where she also hosted boxers Sugar Ray Leonard and Jersey Joe Walcott.

Video Oral History Interview with Xernona Clayton, Section A2005_143_002_006, TRT: 6:15:51 ?

Xernona Clayton reflects upon her legacy as a Chicago teacher. She tells the story of a child who disclosed in secret that she was being abused. Clayton reported the incident, but it continued to haunt her for years. She was recently contacted by a former student who was inspired by Clayton's message to keep the denigrating conditions of the ghetto out of her psyche. The girl excelled in school, earning her Ph.D. and becoming a noted professor. Around 1959, Clayton and her husband, Edward Clayton, moved to Los Angeles, California to establish an office of Johnson Publishing Company. Her husband began volunteering for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Clayton organized a singing tour for Coretta Scott King. The Claytons eventually relocated from Los Angeles to Atlanta, Georgia to work for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference full time. Although they were not well paid, she and her husband appreciated the value of their labor for equality.