

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Constance Rice

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Rice, Constance L., 1956- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, |
| Dates: | April 28, 2011 and October 5, 2005 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2005 and 2011 |
| Physical Description: | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:02:49). |
| Abstract: | Nonprofit chief executive and civil rights lawyer Constance Rice (1956 -) cofounded the law firm of English, Munger and Rice, and was the cofounder and director of the Advancement Project, a public policy legal action organization. She won over \$15 billion in injunctive relief and damages for multiracial coalitions of lawyers and clients. Rice was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 28, 2011 and October 5, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2005_232 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Activist lawyer Constance L. Rice was born on April 5, 1956, in Washington, D.C., to Anna L. Barnes Rice, a science teacher, and Phillip Leon Rice, a colonel in the United States Air Force. Growing up abroad, Rice attended the Town and Country School in London and graduated from the Universal City High School in Texas in 1974. Rice received her B.A. degree in government from Harvard University in 1978. In 1980, Rice won a first degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do

and was awarded the Root Tilden Public Interest Scholarship to New York University School of Law from which she earned her J.D. degree in 1984. Rice served as a law clerk for the State of New York Department of Law in 1982; was mentored by Lani Guinier of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in 1983; and from 1984 to 1986, served as law clerk for the Honorable Damon J. Keith of the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Detroit, Michigan.

From 1986 to 1987, Rice served as an associate attorney for Morrison and Foster in San Francisco, California. In 1987, Rice served as special assistant to the associate vice chancellor of the University of California at Los Angeles. Rice served as the president of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power from 1990 to 1995. In 1990, Rice joined the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Los Angeles as western regional counsel; she was involved in the NAACP's unsuccessful fight against California Proposition 209; the freeing of Black Panther Geronimo Pratt with the assistance of Johnnie Cochran; and the defense of Riverside police officer Rene Rodriguez. In 1998, Rice helped found the firm of English, Munger and Rice with her law partner, Molly Munger. Rice also co-founded and served as co-director of the Advancement Project, a public policy legal action organization. In 1999, Rice launched a coalition lawsuit that won \$750 million for new school construction in Los Angeles. Up to the date of her interview, Rice had won \$15 billion worth of injunctive relief and damages for multi-racial coalitions of lawyers and clients.

In 2000, Rice was named one of California's top 10 most influential lawyers by *California LawBusiness*. In 2003, Rice received an honorary doctorate from Occidental College, and in 2004, was presented the Women Lawyers of Los Angeles Ernestine Stahlhut Award. Rice appeared on *The Tavis Smiley Show*, *Nightline*, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, ABC's *This Week* and dozens of radio and television talk shows.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Constance Rice was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 28, 2011 and October 5, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit chief executive and civil rights lawyer Constance Rice (1956 -) cofounded the law firm of English, Munger and Rice, and was the cofounder and director of the Advancement Project, a public policy legal action organization. She won over \$15 billion in injunctive relief and damages for multiracial coalitions of lawyers and clients.

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:

Rice, Constance L., 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Rice, Constance L., 1956---Interviews

African American women lawyers--Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

Public interest lawyers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 Constance Rice, April 28, 2011 and October 5, 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).

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 Constance Rice, Section
A2005_232_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/10/05

Constance Rice was born on April 5, 1956 in Washington, D.C. to Anna Barnes Rice and Phillip Rice, Sr. Her maternal great-grandmother operated mills in Amissville, Virginia. Rice recounts how Amissville's ordinance against fugitive slave retrieval also helped to protect freed slaves, like her maternal ancestors. Rice's maternal grandmother, Grace Barnes, moved to Reading, Pennsylvania as a teenager. Rice's maternal grandfather, Jess Barnes, left North Carolina after threatening a group of white men who had attacked his grandmother. He served in World War I before moving to Reading. Rice's paternal ancestors were slaves of their white half-siblings. She compares the impact of slavery on her white and African American ancestors. Because they were educated, Rice's paternal family was a target of racial violence in

Birmingham, Alabama. Her mother attended Howard University, where she met Rice's father. She was discouraged from medical school when professors feared she would take a black man's spot.

African American women lawyers--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Public interest lawyers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, Section
A2005_232_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 2005/10/05

Constance Rice's paternal grandfather, William Rice, learned Hebrew and Greek while he attended seminary. In Birmingham, Alabama, he and his wife owned and operated a printing press and opened a school to educate other African Americans. Her father, Phillip Rice, Sr., studied Russian at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he met Rice's mother. He became a pilot and the first black liaison to the American Embassy in London, England. Rice reflects upon her family's emphasis on education and achievement and the status afforded to them based on their mixed-race heritage. Rice inherited her mother's sunny disposition and her father's love of solitude. She lived in various cities worldwide with her two younger brothers, including Misawa Air Force Base in Japan, where she remembers experiencing an earthquake. In Ohio, Rice attended Shaker Heights High School, where she was the only African American taking all advanced placement classes. Rice reflects upon the state of African American education.

Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, Section
A2005_232_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 2005/10/05

Constance Rice experienced the sights and sounds of cities like Hong Kong and London, England since her father's job as a U.S. Air Force colonel took the family around the world. She explains how traveling influenced her perception of the United States. Her parents instilled confidence in Rice, and, despite their lack of wealth, made sure she and her brothers participated in many extracurricular activities. Rice attended excellent schools like St. Mary's Town and Country School in London, where she learned four languages, as well as failing

schools, such as Randolph High School in Universal City, Texas. Her parents always assigned her extra homework. They frequently had to argue with guidance counselors to place Rice in honors classes. She remembers encouragement from her biology teacher, Mr. Harris, and her French teacher, Ms. Segal. Rice reflects upon the kind treatment that she and her mother both received from their Jewish teachers. She compares dysfunctional poverty to the poverty of her grandparents.

Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, Section
A2005_232_002_004, TRT: 1:31:22 2011/04/28

Constance Rice followed the televised Watergate trials and was inspired by Barbara Jordan, who became her role model. Rice graduated from Randolph High School in Universal City, Texas in 1974. She wanted to study communications at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, but instead attended Harvard University's Radcliffe College to please her father. In college, she was taught by scholars like Harvey Mansfield and John Kenneth Galbraith, lived in the same dorm as Sanam Bhutto and was surrounded by children from elite families. Her time at Harvard helped her understand the country's power structure and inspired her to advocate for the powerless. After an altercation where she was struck by a male student, Rice decided to study taekwondo and earned her black belt before graduating in 1978. Rice worked at Harvard's admissions office when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Regents of California v. Bakke*. She reflects on the methods and effectiveness of social movements of the past.

Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, Section
A2005_232_002_005, TRT: 5:30:44 2011/04/28

Constance Rice met Ewart Guinier and Cornel West while attending Radcliffe College and Harvard University. She learned about slavery from Orlando Patterson and debated affirmative action with Martin L. Kilson, Jr. in his office hours. She recalls her study of taekwondo and how her time at Harvard helped her to interact with the elite. During the bussing crisis in Boston, Rice and other African American college students were targets of racial violence. Rice worked as a Harvard admissions officer in

1978, and she remembers an outstanding application from a Vietnamese refugee. She describes how Harvard's admissions policies were upheld as a model in the ruling of *The Regents of California v. Bakke* U.S. Supreme Court case. Rice abandoned her journalism dreams upon deciding she wanted a career that would allow her to pursue justice more directly. She won the Root-Tilden-Kern Scholarship and was accepted to New York University School of Law in 1980.

Video Oral History Interview with Constance Rice, Section A2005_232_002_006, TRT: 6:31:13 2011/04/28

Constance Rice attended New York University School of Law in 1980 and did research for the State of New York attorney general's office. After her first year of law school, she spent the summer working for the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund. The next summer, she clerked for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund under HistoryMaker Lani Guinier, John Charles Boger and James Nabrit, III. With the reinstatement of the death penalty, Rice and her colleagues worked strenuously to assist in capital punishment defense cases. Later that summer, the Baldus Study proving racial bias in sentencing was published. Rice and the LDF used the study for the *McCleskey vs. Kemp*, 1987 case in hopes of calling into question the constitutionality of the death penalty. Rice reflects upon her experience with death row cases and the flaws of the American judicial system. She explains how most laws were created to preserve power for the elite.