

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco

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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>	Delco, Wilhelmina R. (Wilhelmina Ruth), 1929-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 4, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:09).
<b>Abstract:</b>	State representative The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco (1929 - ) served ten terms in the Texas Legislature and served on more than twenty different committees. In 1991 she was appointed speaker pro tempore, the first woman and the second African American to hold the second highest position in the Texas House of Representatives. Delco was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 4, 2006, in Austin, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_090
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

On July 16, 1929, Wilhelmina R. Delco was born to Juanita and William P. Fitzgerald in Chicago, Illinois. She attended Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago where she served as president of the student body and was a member of the National Honor Society. Delco received her B.A. degree in sociology from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1950.

In 1952, Delco married, had four children and relocated to Texas. As a concerned parent, Delco became an active leader in the Parent Teacher Association of her children's school. Delco ran and was elected to the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees in 1968, three days after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This landmark victory made Delco the first African American elected to public office in Austin, Texas. Following her first term on the school board, Delco sought to become a force in statewide policy-making and ran a successful campaign for the Texas House of Representatives, making her the first African American elected official elected at-large in Travis County.

Delco served ten terms in the Texas Legislature and served on more than twenty different committees. Delco was a founding member of the Austin Community College Board. In 1979, Delco was appointed chair of the House Higher Education Committee where she served until 1991 when she was appointed speaker pro tempore. This made her the first woman and the second African American to hold the second highest position in the Texas House of Representatives.

Since her retirement from the Texas Legislature in 1995, Delco remains an active force in education. Having been awarded honorary doctoral degrees from ten colleges and universities, Delco is the chair of the Board of Trustees at Houston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas, and serves as an adjunct professor at the University of Texas at

Austin with the Community College Leadership Program. She and her husband, Dr. Exalton A. Delco, Jr., live in Austin, Texas. They have four children and nine grandchildren.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco was conducted by Denise Gines on May 4, 2006, in Austin, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. State representative The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco (1929 - ) served ten terms in the Texas Legislature and served on more than twenty different committees. In 1991 she was appointed speaker pro tempore, the first woman and the second African American to hold the second highest position in the Texas House of Representatives.

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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:

Delco, Wilhelmina R. (Wilhelmina Ruth), 1929-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Delco, Wilhelmina R. (Wilhelmina Ruth), 1929---Interviews

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African American state legislators--Texas--Interviews.

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African American women legislators--Texas--Interviews.

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College trustees--Texas--Austin--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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Texas

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## Occupations:

State Representative

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, May 4, 2006. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, Section  
A2006\_090\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco was born on July 16, 1929 in Chicago, Illinois to Juanita Heath Watson and William Fitzgerald, Sr. Her maternal grandparents were Wilhelmina Irving Heath, an African American nurse, and George Heath, a carpenter, the son of the white president of New Orleans' Straight University and a Native American woman. Delco's mother was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1911, and her family moved to Chicago when she was nine years old. Delco's father was born in Fitzgerald, Georgia, and moved to Chicago as a child. Delco's parents met at Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, and left school to marry. They were active in Chicago's 2nd Ward Regular Democratic Organization. Delco was the oldest of her parents' five children, who all attended Wendell Phillips High School. Her parents divorced when she was twelve years old. Her father remarried; and, after completing a GED degree, her mother attended Rutgers University. Delco recalls how her father's womanizing continued until his death.

African American state legislators--Texas--Interviews.

African American women legislators--Texas--Interviews.

College trustees--Texas--Austin--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, Section  
A2006\_090\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco lived in the Ida B. Wells Homes in Chicago, Illinois, attended Olivet Baptist Church, went to the local YMCA every Sunday, and attended Wendell Phillips High School. Her mother brought her family to Dixmoor, Illinois each summer, where they visited the farm of a friend, Mr. Howard. Delco's mother also insisted that her children attend college. Congressman William L. Dawson wanted Delco to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and to be the first black student in a dormitory there. Dawson abandoned the plan after the Chicago Tribune published a photo of Delco arguing with a white boy at a conference. Instead, Delco enrolled at Nashville's Fisk University in 1946, and became the first in her family to attend college. She majored in sociology; joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; frequented the student opera; and met her husband, Exalton Delco, Jr. Delco recalls the university's academic rigor, close knit community, and speech training.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, Section  
A2006\_090\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco met her husband, Exalton Delco, Jr., at Fisk University, and they married in 1952. After he was hired by Texas Southern University, Delco lived with her husband in Houston. In 1954, he joined the U.S. Army, and they moved to Germany. They returned to Texas in 1956, and Delco's husband pursued his Ph.D. degree at the University of Texas at Austin. Delco worked part time for the Texas Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, and was active in her local Parent Teacher Association. She was first elected to office in 1968, after campaigning for a seat on the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees; she recalls the death of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. two days before the election. Delco served for six years,

overseeing the integration of Austin's public schools, and winning a debate to name L.C. Anderson High School in honor of Austin's first black principal. With the support of Ann Richards, Delco won a seat in the Texas House of Representatives in 1974.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, Section A2006\_090\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco served on the Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees in 1972, when the Adams v. Richardson decision mandated immediate school desegregation in Austin, Texas. Subsequently, she regularly attended football games, concerts, and other events in district schools to supervise integration standards. Delco recalls interceding to protect African American students wrongly accused of inciting a riot at Austin's John H. Reagan High School. She talks about how the busing of highly achieving African American students to the suburbs and the erosion of family norms have both negatively impacted inner city schools in Texas. Delco retired from the Texas House of Representatives in 1995, after serving as chair of the Higher Education Committee. She later became the chair of the board of trustees of Huston-Tillotson University in Austin. Delco reflects upon her life; her hopes and concerns for her grandchildren and future generations; and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco, Section A2006\_090\_001\_005, TRT: 0:16:38 ?

The Honorable Wilhelmina Delco narrates her photographs.