

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gwendolyn Patton

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Patton, Gwendolyn M., 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton,
Dates:	March 19, 2007 and September 5, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:33:29).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and archivist Gwendolyn Patton (1943 - 2017) worked in the archives at Trenholm Technical College, one of the few archives at a two year college. Patton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 19, 2007 and September 5, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_098
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gwendolyn Marie Patton was born on October 14, 1943 in Detroit, Michigan to Jeanetta and Clarence Patton. After the death of her mother in 1957, Gwendolyn and her siblings moved to Montgomery, Alabama. She attended George Washington Carver High School and graduated in 1961 with academic honors. She went on to receive her B.A. degree in English and history from Tuskegee Institute in 1966.

Patton coined the phrase “scholar-activist” and urged students to work in the community for social, political and economic change. She was also the Direct Action Chair for the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League, which planned strategies to desegregate Macon County in all areas, especially employment.

Though her grandmother’s rental property was the Freedom House that was used by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the Civil Rights Movement, Patton herself was active with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

In 1972, Patton received her M.A. degree in education from Antioch University in Washington, D.C. and returned home to Alabama to accept a position as director of the Alabama State University Academic Advising Center. She later held the University’s Freshman Coordinator position from 1981 to 1986. Patton received her Ph.D. (ABD) from Union Graduate University Consortium and her LL.D. from the Interdenominational Institute of Theology.

Patton has made many noteworthy accomplishments, including founding the National Anti-War Anti-Draft Union against the war in Vietnam in 1969, the National Association of Black Students, and the New Alabama New South Coalition. She was selected to be an Aspen Institute Fellow and also wrote and published *The Insurgent Memories* in 1981. Patton is listed in the *International Who’s Who of Intellectuals* and is designated as a “Special Scholar” by the Institute of Higher Education and Research at the University of Alabama.

In 1992, Patton became an archivist for Trenholm Technical College, where she has assisted in establishing one of

the few archives in the United States at a two year college.

Patton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 19, 2007.

Patton passed away on May 11, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gwendolyn Patton was conducted by Denise Gines on March 19, 2007 and September 5, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and archivist Gwendolyn Patton (1943 - 2017) worked in the archives at Trenholm Technical College, one of the few archives at a two year college.

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:

Patton, Gwendolyn M., 1943-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Patton, Gwendolyn M., 1943- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

Archivist

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 Gwendolyn Patton, March 19, 2007 and September 5, 2007. 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 Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_001, TRT: 0:29:42
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Gwendolyn Patton was born on October 14, 1943 in Detroit, Michigan to Jeanetta Bolden Patton and C. Robert Patton, Sr. Both sides of her family came from Montgomery, Alabama. There, her paternal great-great-grandfather took the name of Robert M. Patton, who governed Alabama after the Civil War; and Patton's paternal great-grandmother, Carrie Miner, had a brother whose three children were able to pass as white. Patton's paternal grandfather was a landowner and carpenter; and built Montgomery's first black-owned hotel, the Ben Moore Hotel. Patton's maternal ancestors were brought from South Carolina to Georgia as slaves, and later settled near Montgomery in Lowndesboro, Alabama. There, her maternal great-grandfather owned a horse farm, and raised children who went on to professional careers. Patton's maternal grandmother left her alcoholic husband at the start of the Great Depression. She raised three children, including Patton's mother, while working as a nanny for a white family.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30
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Gwendolyn Patton's mother, Jeanetta Bolden Patton, graduated in 1940 from Loveless High School in Montgomery, Alabama; and went on to attend the Lewis College of Business in Detroit, Michigan. There, she was followed by Patton's father, C. Robert Patton, Sr., whom she had met at a high school dance. Patton grew up in a predominantly black community in Inkster, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Her father worked for the Cadillac Motor Car Division; and, in 1947, won the numbers lottery. From that time, he was involved in local politics, and raised Patton and her brother in a wealthy household. Patton learned about African American history at her elementary school in Inkster; and, during the summers, she attended church and practiced etiquette while visiting her relatives in Montgomery, Alabama. Patton also remembers the death of her maternal uncle, who was shot and killed by police for refusing to appear before a draft board in 1943.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30
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Gwendolyn Patton's parents, Jeanetta Bolden-Patton and C. Robert Patton, Sr., raised her in a wealthy household in Inkster, Michigan. Her mother permitted her father to have extramarital relationships; and, by another woman, he had a daughter, Sandy Patton, with whom Patton and her brother were close. When Patton was in the tenth grade at Inkster High School in 1958, her mother died of cancer. She advised her father to marry her half-sister's mother, who came from a lower economic background. However, Patton clashed with her stepmother, and decided to join her relatives in Montgomery, Alabama. Patton was familiar with the segregated South, as she visited her grandparents there each summer. Patton also describes her and her brother's relationship with their mother, as well as her grandparents' involvement with Montgomery's voter registration movement and citizenship schools. She also remembers being called a slur while sitting at the counter of Montgomery's Liggetts drugstore.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_004, TRT: 0:28:00
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Gwendolyn Patton frequently visited her relatives in Montgomery, Alabama. There, she acted as a messenger for the Montgomery Improvement Association during the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956. In this role, she received guidance from activists like Hazel Gregory and Idessa Redden; and attended the

association's meetings with her paternal grandfather, businessman Samuel Patton, Sr., who was a member of the group's advisory board. Following her mother's death, Patton moved to Montgomery in 1960 from Inkster, Michigan. She excelled at Montgomery's George Washington Carver High School, and was one of two salutatorians at graduation. Although her family encouraged her to integrate the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Patton matriculated at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, as she admired the legacy of Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. Patton talks about the bus segregation lawsuit of *Browder v. Gayle*, which was decided in 1956. She also describes her upbringing in Inkster.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30
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Gwendolyn Patton matriculated in 1961 at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Soon after, she contracted tuberculosis, and was treated at the Batson Memorial Sanatorium in LaFayette, Alabama. When she returned to Tuskegee, Patton worked to dismantle the class divisions among the school's students, faculty and staff. As the student body president, she also helped organize a march from Tuskegee to Montgomery, Alabama to coincide with the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. During the planning process, she met with SNCC activists like James Forman and Reverend James Bevel; and, just before the start of the march, Patton and her peers witnessed the events of Bloody Sunday on television, including the beating of Amelia Boynton Robinson. After Judge Frank Minis Johnson Jr. issued an injunction to halt the march from Selma, Tuskegee Institute President Luther Foster, Jr. advised Patton to obey the order, but she insisted that it did not apply to the march from Tuskegee.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_001_006, TRT: 0:28:01
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Gwendolyn Patton was treated in the early 1960s at the Batson Memorial Sanatorium in LaFayette, Alabama, where she advocated for patient access to the library. Upon her return to Tuskegee Institute, she helped organize a civil rights march from Tuskegee to Montgomery, Alabama. Her article on the Black Power movement, 'Pro-Black, Not Anti-White,' preceded her hiring in 1966 at the Southern Student Human Relations Project in Atlanta, Georgia, where she roomed briefly with SNCC activist Stokely Carmichael. She also organized the first national Black Power conference, which was held in Tuskegee. Around this time, Patton suffered a car accident that resulted in the paralysis of her left side. After a stay at Tuskegee's John A. Andrew Memorial Hospital, she moved to the Hospital for Joint Diseases in New York City, where she was treated by Dr. Human Robbins; and obtained a bone transplant at the National Naval Medical Center. Patton also describes her confrontation with segregationist George Wallace in 1966.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_002_007, TRT: 0:28:46
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Gwendolyn Patton was the student body president of the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama in the mid-1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. During this time, a fellow student activist, Sammy Younge, Jr., was shot and killed. Patton helped found the National Black Antiwar Antidraft Union in 1968; and, one year later, formed the National Association of Black Students in response to the challenges faced by black university students. Her organizing work with universities led to her graduate studies in education at Antioch College in Washington, D.C., where she wrote her thesis on the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947. Around this time, Patton helped unionize

domestic workers, the majority of whom were African American women, in New York City and Washington, D.C. She went on to found a student economic development corporation; and, under J. Patrick Rooney's direction, served as an advisor to minority business students. Patton also recalls being targeted by federal intelligence agents.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_002_008, TRT: 0:29:10
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Gwendolyn Patton was a member of the faculty of the School of Contemporary Studies at Brooklyn College in Brooklyn, New York from 1973 to 1977. She then returned to Montgomery, Alabama, where she wrote a column based on Langston Hughes' character, Jesse B. Semple, for the Montgomery Tuskegee Times; and hosted the 'Harambee' television program. Around this time, Patton was diagnosed with breast cancer, and was treated at the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. She went on to serve for eight years on the faculty of Montgomery's Alabama State University under the leadership of Dr. Levi Watkins. She also campaigned successfully as a delegate in favor of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's presidential candidacy in 1984. Patton describes the Alabama New South Coalition, a nonpartisan organization that was organized in support of Reverend Jackson's campaign. She also talks about her marriage to Jerry Woods, her pedagogical methods and her perspective on standardized testing.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_002_009, TRT: 0:29:20
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Gwendolyn Patton was one of nine Democratic delegates from Alabama elected in favor of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's presidential candidacy in 1984. At this point in the interview, Patton talks about how her experience in grassroots organizing informed her political activities. Because of her politics, Patton struggled to find employment after leaving the faculty of Alabama State University, but was eventually hired by President Thad McClammy of the H. Councill Trenholm State Technical College in Montgomery, Alabama. Patton went on to establish the college's archives. For her doctoral studies at Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York, she researched the counties in Alabama that resisted the state's ordinance of secession in 1861. In addition, Patton talks about the influence of her maternal grandmother, including her beliefs on freedom; and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, her advice to future generations and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn Patton, Section A2007_098_002_010, TRT: 0:15:00
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Gwendolyn Patton narrates her photographs.