

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Sharon Pratt

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt,
Dates:	January 29, 2008 and July 26, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2008
Physical Description:	15 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:09:29).
Abstract:	Mayor The Honorable Sharon Pratt (1944 -) was the first African American woman to become mayor of Washington, D.C. Pratt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 29, 2008 and July 26, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_214
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Washington, D.C. Mayor Sharon Pratt was born on January 30, 1944 in Washington, D.C. Pratt is the daughter of Mildred Petticord and Carlisle Edward Pratt. Pratt graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1961 and earned her B.S. degree in political science in 1965 from Howard University. Pratt attended Howard University Law School where she earned her J.D. degree in 1968.

Pratt served as in-house counsel for the Joint Center for Political Studies from 1970 to 1971. From 1971 to 1976, she worked as an associate for the law firm Pratt & Queen PC. In 1972, Pratt became a law professor at the Antioch School of Law in Washington, D.C., and worked there until 1976 when she became the Associate General Counsel for the Potomac Electric Power Company, known as PEPCO. In 1982, Pratt directed the failed mayoral campaign for Patricia Robert Harris. That same year, Pratt married Arrington Dixon, a Democratic Washington, D.C. City Councilman. Pratt was promoted to the Director of Consumer Affairs for the Potomac Electric Power Company in 1979 and then later to Vice President of Consumer Affairs in 1983. In 1988, Pratt announced that she would challenge Mayor Marion Barry in the 1990 mayoral election in Washington, D.C. Pratt was elected Mayor of Washington D.C., the first African American female to hold this position. In 1994, she lost her bid for re-election as mayor to Marion Barry. From 1997 to 2001, Pratt served as the President of @ The Center, a start-up electrical marketplace for Africa. In 2002, Pratt began Pratt Consulting, working with companies and governments developing Homeland Security/Emergency Management Plans. She is also the Executive Vice President for BI Solutions.

Pratt's past and present board memberships include: the Center For Creative Leadership, the Democratic National Convention, Society for PSP, Emmitsburg St. Mary's College Board, Opportunity Funding Corporation and a trustee at Howard University. Pratt is also the recipient of the Presidential Award from the NAACP, *Glamour* magazine's Woman of the Year Award, the Congressional Black Caucus' Mary McCleod Bethune-W.E. Dubois Award and the Clean Cities Award.

Pratt is divorced, has two children, Aimee A. Dixon and Drew Williams, and is also a grandmother.

Pratt was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 26, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt was conducted by Cheryl Butler on January 29, 2008 and July 26, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 15 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mayor The Honorable Sharon Pratt (1944 -) was the first African American woman to become mayor of Washington, D.C.

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:

Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington (D.C.)

Occupations:

Mayor

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Sharon Pratt, January 29, 2008 and July 26, 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 The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_001, TRT: 0:29:04 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt was born January 30, 1944 in Washington, D.C. Her mother, Mildred Pratt, was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and moved to D.C. during her youth. Pratt's father, Carlisle Edward Pratt, Jr., was born in Washington, D.C. where his parents, Hazel Drew Pratt and Edward Carlisle Pratt, Sr., worked for the federal government. Pratt's parents met at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in D.C. During World War II, Pratt's mother worked at the Navy Yard and her father was assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia. He later attended Washington D.C.'s Terrell Law School. After her mother died when she was four years old, Pratt's paternal grandmother and aunt helped her father raise her and her sister, HistoryMaker Benaree Pratt Wiley, in the Bloomingdale neighborhood of D.C. She describes the experience of growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in segregated city and the prominent African American lawyers and women her family knew. Pratt attended Lucretia Mott and Rudolph Elementary Schools in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_002, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt attended all-black Lucretia Mott Elementary School, then transferred to the integrated Randolph Elementary School in the Petworth neighborhood after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. Pratt describes the integrated neighborhood of Petworth in Washington, D.C. Pratt then attended MacFarland Junior High School. Pratt grew up learning about African American art and history. For her sixteenth birthday, her father, gave her 'Black's Law Dictionary.' In 1957, Pratt enrolled at Roosevelt High School where she served as president of her class. Her high school mentor Mary Helen Blackburn encouraged her to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C. Pratt began her freshman year at Howard in 1961. Pratt talks about prominent African Americans in Washington, D.C. She recalls that skin color structured social relations even within the African American community and describes the practice of "passing" as white. Pratt has both Native American and European ancestry.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_003, TRT: 0:28:34 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt debated Stokely Carmichael in a student discussion group at Washington, D.C.'s Howard University in the early 1960s. Ewart Brown, Jr. staged a campus sit-in her senior year, but SNCC and the SCLC were not heavily involved in campus activism. Pratt describes how she confronted being black middle class as her social consciousness grew. In addition to participating in the debutante balls, she became involved in the nascent Black Power Movement while an undergraduate at Howard. Pratt heard Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Howard University in the early 1960s. She recalls being moved to tears and briefly meeting King after his speech. She likens him to Nelson Mandela, whom she met later in life. After King's speech, campus activism increased, but Howard remained more conservative in nature. Pratt remembers Toni Morrison challenging the conservatism of her students in an introductory humanities course she taught at Howard.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_004, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt participated in student government as an undergraduate at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She also pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. In 1963, she attended the March on Washington with her sister, HistoryMaker Benaree Pratt Wiley. Pratt recalls standing on the National Mall and listening to HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Joseph Lowery and

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak. Pratt also remembers the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November of that year. She graduated from Howard University in 1965 with her B.S. degree in political science. Toni Morrison and Patricia Roberts Harris both influenced her professional ambitions. Pratt enrolled in the Howard University School of Law, choosing to stay in the area so she could marry Arrington Dixon. In the late 1960s, she became active in the Home Rule Movement in Washington D.C.; and, in 1968, she supported her husband's campaign for the D.C. school board.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_005, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt entered Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C. in 1965. She was one of fourteen female law students and she encountered sexual harassment and discrimination from her professors. The Women's Movement of the late 1960s began to change Howard's culture. Pratt identifies professor Patricia Roberts Harris as one example of the increasing leadership opportunities for women. As a law student, Pratt did not participate in much political activism, but she did oppose the Vietnam War and applaud passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Pratt graduated from Howard with her J.D. degree in 1968. She worked for her father, Carlisle Edward Pratt, at his law firm and then took time off to care for her two daughters. Pratt remembers the 1968 assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the riots that broke out in Washington, D.C., and the new generation of Black Power activists. In 1970, Pratt became in-house counsel for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_006, TRT: 0:28:21 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt began working at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in Washington, D.C. in 1970. After the District of Columbia Home Rule Act passed in 1974, Pratt became involved in campaigns for Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Mayor. She used her status as representative to the Democratic National Committee to argue for greater political rights for D.C. In 1978, Pratt supported HistoryMaker Sterling Tucker in his campaign against Walter Washington and HistoryMaker Marion Barry for Mayor of D.C. Pratt joined the faculty of D.C.'s Antioch School of Law in 1972 and taught there for four years. She then joined the law department at the Potomac Electric Power Company. In 1979, she became director of consumer affairs, and in 1983, she rose to the position of vice president of consumer affairs. Pratt remained involved in D.C. politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s, serving as co-chair of several regional committees for the Democratic National Committee.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section A2007_214_001_007, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

The Honorable Sharon Pratt joined Patricia Roberts Harris' campaign team when Harris ran for Mayor of Washington, D.C. in 1982. Harris ran against incumbent HistoryMaker Marion Barry, whose political style was shaped by his grassroots organizing as a civil rights activist. With the majority of the support of the black community, Barry defeated Harris. Pratt describes how the 1974 District of Columbia Home Rule Act influenced Washington, D.C. politics during the 1970s and 1980s. Pratt left her position as vice president of consumer affairs at the Potomac Electric Power Company in 1988 to run for Mayor of Washington, D.C. She relied on grassroots organizing in her 1990 campaign against Marion Barry. After Barry's arrest in January 1990 for cocaine

possession and use, three other Democrats entered the race against Pratt. She defeated John Ray in the 1990 Democratic primary for mayor of Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_008, TRT: 0:28:56 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_008E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_009, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_009E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_010, TRT: 0:28:48 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_010E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_011, TRT: 0:18:24 ?

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Sharon Pratt, Section B2007_214_002_011E, TRT: