

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lois Conley

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Conley, Lois D., 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley,
Dates:	October 19, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:22:40).
Abstract:	Museum chief executive Lois Conley (1946 -) founded the Griot Museum of Black History and Culture in St. Louis, Missouri. Conley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 19, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_299
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Museum chief executive Lois Diane Conley was born in St. Louis, Missouri on July 29, 1946. Conley was born to Leo and Emma Conley, as the second oldest of eight children. Conley attended St. Louis's Waring Elementary School and Vashon High School. After graduating from high school in 1964, Conley attended Saint Louis University where she earned her B.A. degree in communications and her M.A. degree in education.

While researching the black history of St. Louis, Missouri, Conley discovered that notable African Americans, like Madame C.J. Walker and Miles Davis influenced St. Louis history. She became inspired to memorialize their impact and went back

to school for museum studies. Conley earned a graduate certificate in museum studies from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2001 and founded The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture, the second African American history wax museum in the country. The museum was initially named the Blackworld History Wax Museum, and has since gone through several names before settling on The Griot Museum of Black History and Culture. Under Conley's leadership the museum's exhibitions have expanded beyond just wax sculptures to include a slave ship replica.

Conley has received several awards and honors consisting of the Young Women's Christian Association "Special Leader Award," the Older Women's League "Women of Worth Award," the Coalition of 100 Black Women's "Village Builders' Award" and the Monsanto Y's "Zealot Award."

Lois Conley was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 19, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lois Conley was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 19, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Museum chief executive Lois Conley (1946 -) founded the Griot Museum of Black History and Culture in St. Louis, Missouri.

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:

Conley, Lois D., 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Conley, Lois D., 1946---Interviews

African American museum directors--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Museum Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Lois Conley, October 19, 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 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 Lois Conley, Section

A2007_299_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20 2007/10/19

Lois Conley was born on July 29, 1946 in St. Louis, Missouri to Emma Slaughter Conley and Leo Conley. Her maternal great-grandparents migrated to Brooklyn, Illinois after the birth of her maternal grandmother, Mary Taylor Slaughter, in Durant, Mississippi. Conley's grandmother later relocated to St. Louis, after her husband, Conley's maternal grandfather Johnnie Slaughter, was involved in an altercation with a white man. In St. Louis, her grandfather obtained a position at the post office, while her grandmother worked as a maid at the Melbourne Hotel. They raised Conley's mother in St. Louis' Mill Creek Valley neighborhood, where they were acquainted with Josephine Baker's nephew, Richard Martin, Jr. Conley's parents married after attending high school, and went on to have eight children. Her mother worked for the Model Cities and Head Start programs, while her father served as a ranger at the Saint Louis Zoological Park. Conley grew up in a close knit community, and enjoyed visiting the carnival.

African American children--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Migrations--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section

A2007_299_001_002, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/10/19

Lois Conley grew up in St. Louis, Missouri during the 1950s. She began her education at Waring Elementary School, and went on to attend Vashon High School, where she joined the newspaper staff, swim team and student council. Through her guidance counselor, Ernest Patterson, Conley met local businessman James Hurt, Jr., and Pearlie Evans, who was the special assistant to Congressman William Clay, Sr. Patterson also encouraged Conley to further her education; and, although she decided to marry after graduating high school, Conley later earned an associate's degree at Washington University in St. Louis and Forest Park Community College, and a bachelor's degree at Saint Louis University. During this time, she worked as a secretary and editorial associate at the Washington University School of Medicine, and as the

director of administration at the Saint Louis University School of Social Work. Conley also recalls broadcast programs like 'The Shadow,' 'The Lone Ranger' and 'The Nat King Cole Show.'

African American children--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Civil rights movements--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African American students--Education (Secondary)--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section
A2007_299_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/10/19

Lois Conley's mother, Emma Slaughter Conley, discouraged her from participating in the civil rights protests in St. Louis, Missouri. Nevertheless, Conley learned about African American history from her high school teacher, N. Webster Moore; and was deeply saddened by the death of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. As a young adult, Conley frequented a black studies center in St. Louis, where she attended lectures and read 'The Souls of Black Folk' by W.E.B. Du Bois. She began collecting black memorabilia, and researched the origins of her artifacts. She was especially interested in Missouri natives like scientist George Washington Carver; Clark Terry, who was the first black band leader on 'The Tonight Show'; and Elizabeth Keckley, who was born a slave in St. Louis, bought her freedom and became the maid and confidante of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln. After visiting the Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, Conley was inspired to found a similar museum in St. Louis, Missouri.

Civil rights movements--United States--20th century.

African Americans--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section
A2007_299_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/10/19

Lois Conley founded The Black World History Wax Museum in the early 1990s, after visiting the Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, Maryland in 1985. She

acquired the museum's facility in 1991, while also working full time and earning a master's degree in education at Saint Louis University, which she completed in 1992. During her last semester, she took a sculpting class, and learned to make life sized wax figures. Conley exhibited her sculptures at the museum, alongside her black memorabilia collection. Her first display featured the freed slaves Dred Scott, Harriet Robinson Scott and Elizabeth Keckley; inventor George Washington Carver; entrepreneur Hiram Young; novelist William Wells Brown; and philanthropist Clara Brown. She later developed an exhibit about the Middle Passage; and created wax figures of Madame C.J. Walker and Percy Green II, who founded the Action Committee to Improve Opportunities for Negroes. Conley also describes the process of sculpting a wax figure.

Women museum directors--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Museums--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lois Conley, Section
A2007_299_001_005, TRT: 0:24:30 2007/10/19

Lois Conley was the founder of The Black World History Wax Museum in St. Louis, Missouri. The museum featured exhibits on subjects like the Middle Passage, and the explorer York, a slave who was the only black participant in the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The institution also hosted events for African American sororities and fraternities. Conley talks about her daughter, spoken word artist Erika Neal, who helped direct the museum. She also reflects upon her life and legacy, her hopes for the African American community in St. Louis and how she would like to be remembered. Conley concludes the interview by narrating the Josephine Baker display at The Black World History Wax Museum.

Women museum directors--Missouri--Saint Louis.

African Americans--Museums--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Museum exhibitions--Missouri--Saint Louis.