

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Deborah Lathen

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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>	Lathen, Deborah A.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 30, 2008 and January 30, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	18 Betacame SP videocassettes (7:31:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Corporate lawyer Deborah Lathen (1953 - ) was the former Federal Communications Commission Cable Bureau Chief. She also founded Lathen Consulting, which provides consulting services to telecommunications and media companies. Lathen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 30, 2008 and January 30, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_003
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney and former Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Cable Bureau Chief, Deborah Ann Lathen was born on March 28, 1953, in St. Louis, Missouri. After graduating from Cornell University with her B.A. degree in 1975, Lathen went on to earn her J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1978.

Lathen then practiced law at the law offices of Foley and Lardner LLP, and of Keck, Mahin & Cate. In 1982, she became a litigation attorney at The Quaker

Oats Company where she was honored with the Quaker Oats Chairman's Award in 1988. That same year, Lathen was hired as the Senior Counsel for TRW, Inc.

In 1991, Lathen began working as managing counsel for the Nissan Motor Corporation and specialized in the provision of legal services in the areas of general corporate law, logistics, finance, environmental compliance and other general business matters. Lathen worked for the Nissan Corporation until 1998, when she was hired at the FCC as bureau chief of the Cable Services Bureau. In addition to advising the chairman and commissioners on issues related to internet industries, broadband and cable, as bureau chief, Lathen oversaw some significant changes in the communications industry such as the America Online and Time Warner merger, the implementation of the Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act (SHIVA) and the federal regulation of instant messaging.

In 2001, Lathen founded Lathen Consulting in Washington, D.C. and began providing consulting services to telecommunications and media companies. In 2007, she was asked to serve as a board member for British Telecommunications (BT), where she serves on the Remuneration Committee.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Deborah Lathen was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Larry Crowe on April 30, 2008 and January 30, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 18 Betacame SP videocassettes.

Corporate lawyer Deborah Lathen (1953 - ) was the former Federal Communications Commission Cable Bureau Chief. She also founded Lathen Consulting, which provides consulting services to telecommunications and media companies.

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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:

Lathen, Deborah A.

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Lathen, Deborah A.--Interviews

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Corporate lawyers--Interviews

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African American lawyers--Interviews

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African American government executives--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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## **Occupations:**

Corporate Lawyer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

LawMakers

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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 Deborah Lathen, April 30, 2008 and January 30, 2008. 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).

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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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section  
A2008\_003\_002\_001, TRT: 0:27:55 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen describes her family background. Her mother, Olean Jackson Lathan, was born November 14, 1930 in the Mississippi Delta to a family of sharecroppers from the Yalobusha County, Mississippi area, but when Olean was only an infant, she moved with her mother, Maimie Anderson, to Council Bluffs, Iowa, in order to be closer to Maimie's family, who had found work in Omaha, Nebraska. Then, at sixteen, Olean moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to be with her father, Arthur Jackson, where she met Lathan's father, Levi Lathan. Levi was born May 31, 1933 in Grenada, Mississippi, also in the Delta, but moved with his family to St. Louis, where his father, maternal grandfather, and uncles had found work with the Ford Motor Company. The extended family all lived in the same public housing project, clustered around Levi's maternal grandparents, Sullivan and Florence Knox. Levi met Olean during high school in St. Louis, and they married while he was attending Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section  
A2008\_003\_002\_002, TRT: 0:28:20 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen talks about her childhood. To

accommodate her father's teaching career, her family moved frequently during the 1950s and early 1960s, from St. Louis, Missouri to Momence, Illinois; Kankakee, Illinois; Ypsilanti, Michigan; and finally Elgin, Illinois. However, her earliest memories are of her extended family in St. Louis, especially her maternal great-grandmother, Florence Knox, whom she called Little Granny. At home in Elgin, Lathen developed a passion for history and biography, and with her family, followed the progress of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement. During a road trip when she was about nine years old, her father showed her Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, igniting her desire to attend law school there. At Larsen Middle School and Elgin High School in Elgin, Illinois during the late 1960s, she proved herself an exemplary student with a penchant for activism.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section  
A2008\_003\_002\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen talks about her years at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Lathen was determined to attend Cornell University from an early age, when a Girl Scout leader and Cornell alumna described it to her. Lathen was attracted by its beauty and progressive reputation. This reputation frightened her father, though, and when she applied to Cornell in 1970, a year after armed black militants occupied its student union and during its transition to coeducational dorms, he refused to pay for her to go. Earlier, she had been discouraged from attending Cornell by her guidance counselor at Elgin High School in Elgin, Illinois; she recalls both discouraging and encouraging teachers there and at McKinley Elementary School in Elgin. Nevertheless, she entered Cornell in 1971, where her classmates included Judge Zachary W. Carter. In Ithaca, she lived in Ujamaa, a black dorm, and studied in England and Africa. In 1975, she was accepted at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section  
A2008\_003\_002\_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen talks about her corporate law career. At Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1974 to 1978, Lathen's professors included HistoryMakers

Derrick A. Bell, Jr. and C. Clyde Ferguson, and her classmates included HistoryMakers Kenneth C. Frazier and Charles Ogletree. Her coursework was difficult, but she graduated in 1978 to pursue a career in corporate law, despite her earlier interest in pursuing civil rights law. After two years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the firm Foley and Larder, which she disliked, she was hired in 1980 as in-house counsel for the Quaker Oats Company in Chicago, Illinois. There, she represented brands like Gatorade and Fisher-Price. In 1988, she moved to Long Beach, California to work for TRW, Inc., where she learned how to oversee corporate mergers and acquisitions, and in 1990 she transferred to Nissan, where she helped her Japanese management negotiate a partnership with the Ford Motor Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section A2008\_003\_002\_005, TRT: 0:28:46 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen talks about her career and public service in the 1990s and 2000s. She was at Nissan in Los Angeles, California during the 1992 Rodney King riots. Working with HistoryMaker Reverend Cecil L. "Chip" Murray's First African Methodist Episcopal Church and her former employers at the Quaker Oats Company, Lathen coordinated efforts to bring food relief to South Central L.A. In 1998, she was hired by William Kennard to head the Federal Communication Commission (FCC)'s cable bureau in Washington, D.C., helping institute a regulatory environment in which high-speed Internet service could expand. As a Democratic political appointee, her appointment ended after the 2000 presidential election. She then became a private-sector consultant until she was appointed to British Telecom's board of directors in 2007. Lathen describes her community service with Rails to Trails and J.L. Wilson Elementary School in Washington, D.C., her hopes for HistoryMaker Barack Obama, and her concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section A2008\_003\_002\_006, TRT: 0:04:40 2008/04/30

Deborah Lathen reflects upon her life and legacy. Her main concern for the African American community today is the disintegration of family life, as she believes family

is central to African American culture. She believes in living life without regret, and hopes to be remembered as a good daughter, a good aunt, a good friend, and a fun person to be around. Lathen has four nephews, and two nieces in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:13 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_001E, TRT: 0:29:13 2008/04/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:24 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_002E, TRT: 0:29:24 2008/04/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:45 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_003E, TRT: 0:28:45 2008/04/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:36 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_004E, TRT: 0:28:36 2008/04/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:34 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_005E, TRT: 0:29:34 2008/04/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_006, TRT: 0:05:36 2008/01/30

Video Oral History Interview with Deborah Lathen, Section B2008\_003\_001\_006E, TRT: 0:05:36 2008/04/30