

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Michelle L. Collins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Collins, Michelle L., 1960-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Michelle L. Collins,
Dates:	February 21, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:42).
Abstract:	Corporate financial consultant and investment chief executive Michelle L. Collins co-founded a successful private equity firm, Svoboda, Collins, L.L.C., and served as managing director of the firm from 1998 to 2006. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_023
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Michelle Lynn Collins was born in Chicago, Illinois. In 1978, Collins graduated from the University of Chicago laboratory schools, where she attended since the first grade. She then went on to earn her undergraduate degree in economics from Yale University in 1982 and her M.B.A. degree from Harvard University in 1986.

Collins began her career in 1986 at William Blair & Company, a Chicago-based investment firm offering investment banking, asset management, equity research, institutional and private brokerage and private capital to individual, institutional, and issuing clients. Collins primarily advised clients on public equity offerings. Her clients were primarily in the direct marketing, distribution and retailing industries and included Henry Schein, Inc., CDW Corporation, Lands' End, Inc., Coldwater Creek, Inc., and United Stationers, Inc., among other public and private companies. Collins also advised clients on mergers and acquisitions. In 1991, Collins advanced to become a Principal Partner in the Corporate Finance Department of William Blair & Company. In 1997, Collins left the company to start a private equity firm with John Svoboda, called Svoboda, Collins, L.L.C. From 1998 to 2006, Collins served as Managing Director of Svoboda Capital Partners, L.L.C. She was also an Advisory Board member and still serves in that capacity, although she no longer serves as the managing director. The firm focuses its investments on business service companies and value-added distribution businesses. It has over \$250 million of capital under management which it invests in middle market companies either through management buyouts, leveraged recapitalizations, or growth equity investments. In addition, Collins was a board member and director of CDW Computer Centers, Inc., from 1996 to 2007. She served as CDW's Audit Committee Chair for seven years and previously served on their Compensation Committee. From 1999 to 2004, Collins was a board member and a director of Coldwater Creek, Inc., a specialty retailer of women's apparel, accessories, jewelry, and gift items. Collins has been a board member and past president of Chicago Sinfonietta, helping to restructure the Sinfonietta's business model and placing it on a more secure financial foundation. In 2003, Collins became a director and board member of Molex, Inc., a global manufacturer of electronics, electrical and fiber optic interconnection products and systems.

Collins is a trustee of The Field Museum, the Chicago Historical Society, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, the Erikson Institute, the Chicago Urban League, the YMCA, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Renaissance Schools Fund. Collins is also a member of several professional and civic organizations in Chicago, including The Chicago Network, The Chicago Finance Exchange, Women Corporate Directors, The Economic Club of Chicago, The Commercial Club of Chicago and the Henry Crown Fellows Program of Aspen Institute.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Michelle L. Collins was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate financial consultant and investment chief executive Michelle L. Collins co-founded a successful private equity firm, Svoboda, Collins, L.L.C., and served as managing director of the firm from 1998 to 2006.

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:

Collins, Michelle L., 1960-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Collins, Michelle L., 1960- --Interviews

Investment advisors--Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

Financial executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Investment Banker

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Michelle L. Collins, February 21, 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 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 Michelle L. Collins, Section A2008_023_001_001, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Michelle L. Collins was born in Chicago, Illinois to Elizabeth Terry Collins and Rosecrain Collins, Jr. Her maternal great-great grandfather, Confederate soldier John Quincy Marr, was white, and had children with her Cherokee maternal great-great grandmother, Eliza Nickens. Collins' maternal great-grandfather, Leesther Marr, worked as a butler for financier Andrew Mellon's family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There, his children included Amistad Research Center founder Warren Marr, II, who married attorney Carmel Marr; and Collins' maternal grandmother, Margaret Marr Terry, whose husband, John Terry, was a native of Ohio. Collins' father was born in Southside, Tennessee; and, after the death of his father, Rosecrain Collins, Sr., he moved to Nashville with his mother, who then married Ewing Batson. Her father went on to study at the Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry, and met her mother while she was a student at Fisk University. After marrying, they raised two daughters in Chicago.

Investment advisors--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Financial executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Michelle L. Collins, Section A2008_023_001_002, TRT: 0:26:52 ?

Michelle L. Collins grew up in the Jackson Park Highlands District, an integrated, middle class neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. There, her mother, Elizabeth Terry Collins, worked as a teacher; and her father, Rosecrain Collins, Jr., owned a dental practice in the Hyde Park Kenwood National Bank Building. Collins began her education at Isabelle C. O'Keeffe Elementary School. At her father's insistence, she transferred during the first grade to the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, where she was influenced by her African American teachers, Mrs. Miguel and Mrs. Williams. Collins excelled in math; participated in ballet, tennis and basketball; and studied piano. She continued to attend the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools during her high school years, and completed advanced placement coursework. Her classmates included future investment chief executive John Rogers, Jr. After graduating in 1978, Collins matriculated at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Video Oral History Interview with Michelle L. Collins, Section A2008_023_001_003, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

Michelle L. Collins grew up in the Jackson Park Highlands District of Chicago, Illinois, where her neighbors included Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Elijah Muhammad and jazz musician Ramsey Lewis. The community was located in the formerly all-white South Shore neighborhood, where African Americans were barred from the South Shore Country Club. In 1978, Collins graduated from the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, and enrolled at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where she was one of sixty-five African American students in her class. She majored in economics, and was influenced by African American studies professors John W. Blassingame and Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. She graduated in 1982, and entered the minority training

program at Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City. She worked there as a credit auditor until 1984, when she enrolled at the Harvard Business School. Collins also remembers Yale University President A. Bartlett Giamatti, and Yale Repertory Theatre Director Lloyd Richards.

Video Oral History Interview with Michelle L. Collins, Section A2008_023_001_004, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

Michelle L. Collins enrolled in 1984 at the Harvard Business School, where she was inspired by black faculty like Linda A. Hill and James I. Cash, Jr. She graduated in 1986, and joined William Blair and Company, LLC, an investment bank in Chicago, Illinois. There, she worked in business valuation, and later joined the corporate finance department's financial analysis team. In 1992, Collins became a partner in the firm, and focused on conducting initial public offerings (IPOs) for client companies in the distribution and direct marketing industries. From 1993 to 1997, Collins was responsible for the IPOs of companies like CDW Computer Centers, Inc., Coldwater Creek, Inc. and McWhorter Technologies, Inc.; and she later served on their corporate boards. In 1997, Collins cofounded Svoboda Collins, L.P., a private equity firm that invested in medium sized distribution companies like PNA Holdings, LLC. In 2007, Collins formed a consulting firm, MC Advisory Services, LLC. She also shares her investment philosophy.

Video Oral History Interview with Michelle L. Collins, Section A2008_023_001_005, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Michelle L. Collins served as the president of the Chicago Sinfonietta, an orchestra that promoted diversity in the field of classical music. Collins also served on the board of the Erikson Institute under the leadership of education advocate Barbara Bowman; and on the boards of the Field Museum of Natural History, the Chicago Historical Society and the Renaissance Schools Fund. Additionally, Collins was active with the Chicago Urban League, the Henry Crown Fellowship Program and the Chicago Finance Exchange. She talks about successful minority-owned businesses, and shares her advice for business school students. Collins also reflects upon her career, family, life and legacy; and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.