Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Davis, Myrtle, 1931-

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Myrtle Davis,

Dates: February 28, 2008

Bulk Dates: 2008

Physical Description: 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:53:15).

Abstract: Pharmacist and city council member Myrtle Davis (1931 - ) was a city councilwoman for the City of Atlanta, Georgia. She also ran for mayor of the city in 1993. Davis served as the coordinator for the 1996 Atlanta Expo, and in 1998, she retired from city government as the City of Atlanta's Water Utility Manager. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 28, 2008, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2008_037

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pharmacist and veteran city council member Myrtle Reid Davis was born on October 9, 1931 to Emmalee Reid, a teacher, and Carl Reid, a postal worker. Davis was raised in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she attended Emmett School Elementary and High School. After graduating from high school in 1949, Reid went on to attend Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana where she pursued her B.S. degree in pharmacy.
In 1953, Davis was hired at the Queens City Pharmacy in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1956, she moved to Atlanta, Georgia where she was hired by the Triangle Prescription Shop. That following year, she was married to activist and local physician, Dr. Albert M. Davis.

Throughout the 1960s, Davis served on the boards of numerous Atlanta based organizations including the League of Women Voters of Fulton County, where she served as president. She also served on the board of directors for the Gate City Day Nursery Association, and in 1970, she was elected to serve on the board of directors for the Atlanta Urban League. In 1979, Davis was hired by Leadership Atlanta where she worked as co-executive director for ten years.

In 1981, Davis ran for public office and was elected as a member of the Atlanta City Council. During her tenure on the Atlanta City Council, Davis served as chair of the Human Resources Committee, the Water and Pollution Committee and the Community Development Committee. Davis also served for five years as chair of the Finance Committee. Then, in 1994, after Maynard Jackson decided to leave his post as mayor, she became a candidate for mayor of the City of Atlanta. She later became the coordinator for the 1996 Atlanta Expo, and in 1998, Davis retired from city government as water utility manager for the City of Atlanta.

Davis’ other affiliations include the Kiwanis Club of Atlanta, the National Board of Girl Scouts, the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, the Task Force for the Homeless and the City of Atlanta’s Board of Ethics.

Davis lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her two daughters, Judge Stephanie C. Davis and Stacey Davis Stewart. Stephanie is a judge in the Magistrate Court of Fulton County, and Stacey is the senior vice president of Fannie Mae.

Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 28, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Myrtle Davis was conducted by Denise Gines on February 28, 2008, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pharmacist and city council member Myrtle Davis (1931 - ) was a city councilwoman for the City of Atlanta, Georgiа. She also ran for mayor of the city in 1993. Davis served as the coordinator for the 1996 Atlanta Expo, and in 1998, she retired from city government as the City of Atlanta's Water Utility Manager.
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:

Davis, Myrtle, 1931-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:
Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Atlanta (Ga.). City Council.

Occupations:

Pharmacist

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers|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

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 Myrtle Davis, Section A2008_037_001_001, TRT: 0:29:08 2008/02/28

Myrtle Davis was born on October 9, 1931 in Rock Hill, South Carolina to Emmalee Williams Reid and Carl Reid. Her father was born in York, South Carolina to Jane Owens Reid and Joseph Reid, and had Native American ancestry. Her mother was born in Swansea, South Carolina, and was the oldest child of insurance agent George Williams and Georgia Holley Williams, who worked in New York City. Davis’ mother helped raise her younger siblings, and went on to study at the Colored Normal Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College of South Carolina. Davis’ parents met and married in Rock Hill, where her father was a postal worker and her mother worked as a teacher, and later as a school principal. Davis grew up in Rock Hill with her two biological sisters and three orphaned young women, whom her mother adopted and raised. Davis also describes her maternal aunts and uncles, including Principal John Williams; math professor Joshua Williams; and Theodore Williams, who worked at the U.S. Mint.

Video Oral History Interview with Myrtle Davis, Section
Myrtle Davis grew up in a segregated community in Rock Hill, South Carolina. There, she began her education at the all-black Emmett Scott School, where the students used secondhand books from the white schools, and were encouraged by all the teachers to succeed. Outside of school, Davis was active with the Girl Scouts, and played the organ at the all-black St. Mary’s Catholic Church. During her high school years at the Emmett Scott School, Davis excelled academically, and was motivated by her French teacher. She also joined the school’s science club, and played the glockenspiel in the marching band. In 1949, Davis graduated as the valedictorian of her class. She aspired to become a pharmacist, but was barred from attending the University of South Carolina due to her race. The State of South Carolina funded her studies at Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans, where she was confirmed as a member of the Catholic church. Davis also remembers the attack on Naval Station Pearl Harbor and World War II.

Myrtle Davis enrolled at Xavier University of New Orleans in 1949. There, she was encouraged by two of her white instructors, chemistry professor Peter Paytash and pharmacy professor Charles J. Kelly; and was a classmate of Norman Francis, who later served as the university’s president. Davis was active in the Sodality of Our Lady prayer group and the Delta Theta Sigma Sorority; and interned at LaBranche’s Drug Store in the French Quarter, where she was mentored by pharmacist Emile J. LaBranche, Jr. The National Urban League’s President Lester Granger spoke at her graduation in 1953, after which Davis found work at the Queen City Pharmacy in Rock Hill, South Carolina. In 1956, she was recruited by civic leader Whitney Young to work as a pharmacist at Richard C. Hackney’s Triangle Prescription Shop on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. There, she met her husband, physician Albert Miles Davis, whom she married in 1957. Davis also talks about Saint Katharine Drexel and New Orleans’ Mardi Gras celebrations.
Myrtle Davis and her husband built a home in 1960 in Collier Heights, an upper middle class, African American neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. There, they raised their two daughters, Judge Stephanie Davis and foundation executive Stacey Stewart. Davis’ husband, physician Albert Miles Davis, was active in the Civil Rights Movement and served as the president of Atlanta’s NAACP branch. He participated in the student sit-ins of 1960, and bailed arrested demonstrators out of jail. Alongside activist Dr. Clinton Warner, Davis’ husband attempted to check into the Heart of Atlanta Motel to expose their discriminatory policies, and was arrested as a result. In 1966, Davis joined the League of Women Voters of Atlanta-Fulton County, where she ran the voter registration drive and the education committee. Later in the 1970s, Davis served as the league’s president. She also recalls the black business community on Auburn Avenue; Mayor Ivan Allen, Jr.’s Peyton Wall; and civil rights activism in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Myrtle Davis served in 1968 as a board member of the Gate City Day Nursery Association, which provided daycare services to black families in Atlanta, Georgia. She was recruited to the local chapter of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, where she chaired the task force to integrate the board. Later, she joined the board of the Girl Scout Council of Northwest Georgia, Inc., and then the national board. Davis served as the president of the League of Women Voters of Atlanta-Fulton County in 1977; and, in 1979, as the co-executive director of the Leadership Atlanta program. Then, in 1980, Davis’ daughter, Judge Stephanie Davis, suffered a car accident that paralyzed most of her body. Despite this, her daughter matriculated in 1981 at the Emory University School of Law, and obtained a J.D. degree. Also in 1981, Davis ran a successful campaign for the Atlanta City Council against black politician Q.V. Williamson. She was inducted to the council alongside future U.S. Congressman John Lewis.
Myrtle Davis was elected in 1981 to the Atlanta City Council, where she served under council president Marvin S. Arrington, Sr. and Mayor Andrew Young, and was the first chairwoman of the finance committee. In 1993, Davis became Atlanta’s first black female mayoral candidate, running against Councilman Bill Campbell and Fulton County Commissioner Michael Lomax. Following her defeat to Bill Campbell, Davis was recruited to head the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management in 1994, where she served until her husband’s death and her subsequent retirement from city government in 1998. She then became active with the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless. She also served as the board chair of the Urban League of Greater Atlanta, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and the Atlanta Board of Ethics. Davis reflects upon her life and legacy, her advice for future generations and her concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.