Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hon. Cardiss Collins

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
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Creator: Hon. Cardiss Collins

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Cardiss Collins,

Dates: June 28, 2010

Bulk Dates: 2010

Physical Description: 23 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:14:39).

Abstract: U.S. Congresswoman Hon. Cardiss Collins (1931 - ) served for eleven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she helped pass laws that fought discrimination, enforced gender equity, and reformed child care. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 28, 2010, in Alexandria, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2010_059

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former U.S. Congresswoman of Illinois's 7th district Cardiss Collins was born on September 24, 1931, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Finley and Rosia Mae Cardiss Robertson. When she was ten years old, she moved with her family to Detroit, Michigan, where she attended the Detroit High School of Commerce. After high school, Collins moved to Chicago, Illinois to find a job. She worked as a stenographer with the Illinois Department of Labor while simultaneously attending Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where she earned her B.S. degree in accounting. She was promoted to secretary, then accountant at the Illinois Department of Revenue before becoming the revenue auditor. In 1958, Collins married George W. Collins, and in 1959, their son, Kevin, was born. Collins served as committeewoman of the Twenty-fourth Ward Regular Democratic Organization, where she gained her first political experience. She also participated in her husband’s campaigns for alderman, committeeman and U.S. Representative.

Tragically, on December 8, 1972, George W. Collins died in a plane crash. Six months later, Collins was elected to Congress in the June 5, 1973 special election to replace her husband. In 1978, she became the first African American and first woman to chair the Manpower and Housing subcommittee of the House Government Operations Committee and to be named Democratic whip-at-large in the House. One year later, she was elected president of the Congressional Black Caucus. From 1983 to 1991, she served as chair of the Government Activities and Transportation (GAT) Subcommittee, where she helped pass laws that controlled the transport of toxic materials and helped provide more secure air travel. She also introduced the Non-Discrimination in Advertising Act, which denied federal tax write-offs to major advertising firms that ignored black-owned communications media, both print and broadcast. In 1990, she wrote a law that expanded Medicare coverage for screening mammography for millions of elderly and disabled women, and in 1991, she was named chairwoman of the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection, and Competitiveness. In
Congress, she focused on establishing universal health insurance, providing for gender equity in college sports, and reforming federal child care facilities. In 1993, she authored the Child Safety Protection Act, which requires warning labels on dangerous toys and federal safety standards for bicycle helmets. In 1996, Collins chose to retire and did not run for re-election.

The recipient of honorary degrees from Barber-Scotia College, Spelman College, and Winston-Salem State University, Collins was elected to the Black Women’s Hall of Fame in 1982. In 1990, the Congressional Black Caucus presented Collins with the William L. Dawson Award for Legislative Development, and in 1991, she was honored with an American Black Achievement Award for government service. The American Advertising Foundation established the Cardiss Collins Scholarship for Diversity in Advertising at the University of Illinois in 1996, which provides a full-tuition scholarship to a freshman University of Illinois student in advertising. Collins currently lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her son and granddaughter.

Former U.S. Congresswoman Cardiss Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 29, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hon. Cardiss Collins was conducted by Crowe, Larry on June 28, 2010, in Alexandria, Virginia, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. U.S. Congresswoman Hon. Cardiss Collins (1931 - ) served for eleven terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, where she helped pass laws that fought discrimination, enforced gender equity, and reformed child care.

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, Cardiss
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

- African Americans--Interviews.
- Collins, Cardiss--Interviews.
- African American politicians--Illinois--Interviews.
- African American legislators--United States--Interviews.

**Organizations:**

- HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- U.S. House of Representatives

**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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 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, June 28, 2010**

**Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_001, TRT: 0:28:16 2010/06/28**

Hon. Cardiss Collins was born on September 24, 1931 in St. Louis, Missouri. Her mother, Rosia May Robertson, was born on January 1, 1900, in Whiteville, Tennessee, a town named after her great-great grandfather, Erastus White. Collins father, Finley Robertson was also born in Whiteville, Tennessee around 1901. Finley's mother, Dora Robertson, was a school teacher, and her children became teachers as well. Collins describes her earliest childhood memories, and the sights, smells and sounds of her childhood home. Religion was a major part of Collins' upbringing. She attended Pleasant Green Baptist Church in St. Louis, and 2nd Baptist Church when they moved to Detroit, Michigan. She was a part of the choir, participated in bible study and various other church activities. Collins and the interviewer briefly discuss 2nd Baptist Church in Detroit, and its notoriety as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Segregation—Illinois—Cairo.
Segregation—Missouri—St. Louis.
African American religion.
Second Baptist Church (Detroit, Mich.).
African American families--Missouri--Saint Louis.
African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

**Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_002, TRT: 0:29:06 2010/06/28**

Hon. Cardiss Collins discusses moving to Detroit, Michigan in 1939. In St. Louis, Collins attended Banneker Elementary School until third grade before transferring to Bishop Elementary School in Detroit. She spent most of her free time studying, and was surrounded by family. Collins attended Miller High School, then transferred to the Detroit High School of Commerce for stenography and graduated in 1948. Collins listened to the radio, went to the movies, read black publications like the Chicago Defender and went to the Fox Theater to hear live music. Collins discusses the impact of World War II and the Wayne State University extension program at her high school. In 1949, she moved to Chicago and began working for the State of Illinois in 1950 while attending Northwestern University night school. She worked for the State of Illinois until 1972. Collins also discusses meeting her husband, George Collins, in 1957.

Detroit (Mich.)—Social conditions.
African American press.
Wayne State University.
African Americans--Education--Michigan--Detroit.
Civil service—Illinois.
Hon. Cardiss Collins discusses her marriage to George Collins in 1958. They lived on Chicago's west side and, after George graduated from Northwestern University Law School, he became a precinct worker in the 25th Ward. George was later recruited by committeeman Ben Lewis to be precinct captain in the 24th Ward and became the ward committeeman in 1963. It was not until Daniel Ronan died in office in 1969 that George was able to run for Ronan's unexpired seat in the U.S. Congress. Prior to this, George Collins served as an alderman for the 24th Ward from 1964 to 1970. Collins talks about George's reaction to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to Chicago, her own revelations after the visit and the violent reaction to Dr. King's visit. George Collins died on September 8, 1972, in a plane crash. Collins discusses being chosen to run for George's unexpired term.

Hon. Collins discusses her husband's death and her subsequent campaign for his congressional seat. Collins describes running for office and her election. Collins began her term in June of 1973 and describes going to the United States Congress in her first elected office. Among the issues African Americans faced when Collins was elected to office were the military budget, increased diversity in government contracts and expanding African American influence in congressional committees. While in Congress, Collins served on the Foreign Affairs and Government Operations Committees. She is most proud of her work on Title IX, Medicare legislation, bicycle safety and child care legislation. Collins discusses the Congressional Black Caucus, her working relationship with various members of congress, and the addition of two black congressmen from Chicago, Harold Washington and Gus Savage. Collins talks about her working relationship with Gus Savage, and her impression of Harold Washington during his time in congress.

Hon. Cardiss Collins discusses Congressman Danny Davis, who took her seat after she left office in January of 1997. Collins talks about her relationship with...
Congresswomen Shirley Chisholm, Yvonne Braithwaite and Maxine Waters. Collins did not have strong relationships with many of the presidential administrations during her tenure, but she talks about her disappointment with the Ford Administration, and her reaction to the appointment of Clarence Thomas. She describes the Clinton Administration as effective and easy to work with and feels that President Barack Obama is being treated unfairly in his administration. One thing that Collins would do differently would be to bring her son and mother to Washington, D.C. She states that the most important thing she did was work on the growth of childcare in federal buildings. Collins would like to be remembered for doing all that she knew to do, as well as she possibly could.

United States--Politics and government.
Executive-legislative relations—United States.
Thomas, Clarence, 1948-.
Obama, Barack.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Cardiss Collins, Section A2010_059_001_006, TRT: