

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nina M. Wells

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wells, Nina Mitchell, 1950-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells,
Dates:	September 11, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:07:20).
Abstract:	State government appointee and lawyer Nina M. Wells (1950 -) served as the Secretary of State for New Jersey from 2006 to 2010. Wells was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 11, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_216
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer and state government appointee Nina Mitchell Wells was born in 1950 in Washington, D.C. She attended Immaculate Conception Academy, an all-girl catholic high school, and graduated from there in 1968. Wells then enrolled in Mount St. Joseph College, now Mount St. Joseph University, in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1970, she transferred to a women's college, Newton College of the Sacred Heart, where she received her B.A. degree in 1972. Wells went on to receive her J.D. degree from Suffolk University Law School in 1976.

After a brief stay in Los Angeles, California, Wells began her legal career as assistant corporation counsel for the City of Newark legal department. In 1990,

Wells served as head of the Division of Rate Counsel in the Department of the Public Advocate while Governor Jim Florio was in office. She then served as vice president and senior attorney at the CIT Group from 1994 until 1996. In 1996, Wells was hired at Rutgers University School of Law and served as the assistant dean for the Minority Student Program. In 1998, she was named vice president of public affairs at Schering-Plough Corporation and president of their philanthropic arm, Schering-Plough Foundation. Wells was then appointed to New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine's cabinet as the Secretary of State of New Jersey in 2006, and served in that position until 2010.

Wells has served on numerous boards including Seton Hall Preparatory School, Newark Day Center and Teach for America. In 2013, she served on the board of trustees of both the Victoria Foundation and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center Women's Association. She received a nomination by President Barack Obama to serve on the board of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. Wells has also been the recipient of several awards and honors such as the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association Women's Initiative & Leaders in Law (WILL) Platinum Award and the Montclair Art Museum Honoree for Arts Education. Wells has received honorary degrees from Drew University and the College of St. Elizabeth.

Wells and her husband, criminal defense lawyer Theodore Wells, reside in Livingston, New Jersey.

Nina Wells was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 11, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nina M. Wells was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on September 11, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. State government appointee and lawyer Nina M. Wells (1950 -) served as the Secretary of State for New Jersey from 2006 to 2010.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

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:

Wells, Nina Mitchell, 1950-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Feldman, Isaac (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wells, Nina Mitchell, 1950---Interviews

Organizations:

Occupations:

State Government Appointee

Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers|LawMakers

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 Nina M. Wells, September 11, 2014. 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 Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_001, TRT: 1:30:24 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells was born on September 9, 1950 in Washington, D.C. to Pearline Jackson Smith and Ignatius Mitchell, Jr. Her paternal grandmother, Helen Young Mitchell, was the subject of a painting titled 'A Dignified Woman,' which was housed in the Corcoran Gallery of Art and later acquired by BET president Robert L. Johnson. Wells' mother was raised in Mitchellville, Maryland by her mother, Pearl Jackson, and attended Howard University for a few months before leaving to marry Wells' father. He served in the U.S. Army, and worked as both a house painter and mailman. Wells' parents divorced when she was a toddler. Although she lived with her mother, she often accompanied her father to the Smithsonian Institution and the St. Francis de Sales Church. Wells also lived with him during her final two years at the Immaculate Conception Academy in Washington, D.C. While in school, she worked at several U.S. government agencies and as a model for Garfinckel's department store.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_002, TRT: 2:35:26 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells was raised by her mother, Pearline Jackson Smith, and two oldest sisters, Diane Mitchell Hill and Kathy Mitchell Weaver, in Northeast Washington, D.C. Her mother remarried around the time that Wells began high school at the Immaculate Conception Academy, and Wells went to live with her father, Ignatius Mitchell, Jr. During high school, Wells modeled for the Garfinkel's

department store, and designed her own clothes. She often attended parties and socialized with students from Calvin Coolidge High School, where she met her future husband, Theodore V. Wells, Jr. They began dating during high school, and continued their courtship after Wells enrolled at the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, Ohio. Wanting to be closer to her boyfriend, Wells transferred to Newton College of the Sacred Heart in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. Their wedding was held on Christmas day at the Wells family home during her senior year of college.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_003, TRT: 3:30:39 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells graduated in 1972 from Newton College of the Sacred Heart in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. She then attended the Suffolk University Law School in Boston, Massachusetts. During that time, her husband, Theodore V. Wells, Jr., was enrolled in the joint J.D. and M.B.A. degree program at Harvard University. They often studied together at Langdell Hall, which was the Harvard Law School library. Wells also worked for the U.S. Social Security Administration during her first year, but decided to quit in order to focus on her family and her law education. After graduating from law school in 1976, Wells and her husband debated over where to raise their children. They considered living in California or Washington, D.C., and eventually decided to move to Newark, New Jersey because of the city's emphasis on community. Wells served as assistant corporation counsel to the City of Newark until 1979, when she joined New Jersey Bell Telephone Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_004, TRT: 4:31:34 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells served as the assistant corporation counsel to the City of Newark, New Jersey under the city's first African American mayor, Kenneth Gibson. In this capacity, she was the legal advisor to municipal agencies like the Newark Central Planning Board and the real estate commission. During this time, Wells joined the Garden State Bar Association and the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey. Through these organizations, she and her husband, Theodore V. Wells,

Jr., began hosting charitable events and fundraisers for local politicians. They also met many of the state's notable attorneys, including Raymond A. Brown and Donald M. Payne. In 1979, Wells became the first black woman to work in the legal department of the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company. After the breakup of the Bell system in 1984, Wells transferred to Bell Communications Research, Inc., where she ensured compliance with antitrust regulations. In 1990, she went to work for the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_005, TRT: 5:30:32 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells worked in the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate under Governor James Florio. While in office, Florio changed the state tax policies in order to provide equal funding to public schools in poorer communities like Newark, New Jersey. In 1992, Wells took a two-year sabbatical, during which she focused on raising her two children. She also began hosting fundraisers for local politicians and joined a number of charitable boards, including the United Negro College Fund and the United Way of Essex and West Hudson. In 1994, Wells joined the legal department of CIT Financial Corporation after the CEO, Albert R. Gamper, Jr., attended a fundraiser at her home for U.S. Senator Bill Bradley. She stayed in that position for two years, and then became the assistant dean of Rutgers Law School in Newark, New Jersey, where she oversaw the Minority Student Program. At this point, Wells talks about the importance of balancing her career and her family.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_006, TRT: 6:30:05 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells joined the Schering Plough Corporation as the vice president of public affairs in 1998, and later became the president of the Schering Plough Foundation. Through the company's philanthropic arm, Wells enrolled thousands of New Jersey citizens in the state's healthcare program, New Jersey FamilyCare. She also raised funds for the Elizabethport Community Health Center with the help of state senator Jon Corzine. In 2005, Wells' daughter, Teresa Wells, worked on Corzine's gubernatorial

campaign. After taking office in 2006, he appointed Wells to serve as New Jersey's secretary of state. While in office, Wells worked directly with Corzine as an advisor, and was responsible for the renaming of the New Jersey Department of Education building to honor Judge Robert L. Carter. She also oversaw the state polls on Election Day, including during the historic election of President Barack Obama in 2008. At this point, Wells talks about her friendship with former New Jersey Governor Jim McGreevey.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_007, TRT: 7:41:23 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells served as the secretary of state under New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine from 2006 to 2010. She was responsible for the state's travel and tourism budget, and allocated funds to arts organizations like the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton. Wells also served on the Martin Luther King Commission and the New Jersey Commission on American Indian Affairs. At this point, Wells talks about segregation and diversity in New Jersey, as well as Governor Chris Christie, who defunded the state's public broadcasting channel, New Jersey Network, in 2011. During the administration of President Barack Obama, Wells was appointed to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. She reflects upon her career as a corporate lawyer and public official, as well as her marriage and family. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Nina M. Wells, Section
A2014_216_001_008, TRT: 8:17:17 2014/09/11

Nina M. Wells narrates her photographs.