

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dolores D. Wharton

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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>	Wharton, Dolores D.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 14, 2016 and October 4, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	11 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:14:12).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civic leader Dolores D. Wharton (1927 - ) was the first woman, and the first African American, elected to the boards of Michigan Bell Telephone Company, Kellogg Company, Phillips Petroleum Company, and Gannett Company. Wharton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 14, 2016 and October 4, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_001
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Dolores D. Wharton was born on July 3, 1927 in New York City to V. Kenneth Duncan and Josephine Bradford. Wharton attended New York University, Danbury State Teacher's College, and the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City, where she studied modern dance with Martha Graham. She received her B.F.A. degree from Chicago State Teacher's College in the 1960s.

Wharton and her husband, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., lived in Southeast Asia from 1958 to 1964. Following her return to the United States, Wharton wrote

*Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A Biographic Survey*, the first academic survey ever written on Malaysian art. Wharton became the first lady of Michigan State University in 1969, when her husband was appointed president of the university. As first lady, Wharton strengthened the university's relationship with the greater Lansing, Michigan area, and with the student body. President Gerald Ford appointed Wharton to the National Council on the Arts of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1971. She became the first woman, and the first African American, elected to the board of the Michigan Bell Telephone Company in 1974, as well as the boards of the Kellogg Company and the Phillips Petroleum Company in 1976. Wharton initiated and chaired both company's first social responsibility committees. She was also the first woman, and the first African American, elected to the board of the Gannett Company in 1979. Wharton went on to establish the Fund for Corporate Interns, Inc. (later the Fund for Corporate Initiatives) in 1980. In 1984, Wharton expanded FCI to include the young executives program, a week-long seminar that provided corporate leadership development to minority and women corporate employees.

Throughout her career, Wharton served on numerous other boards including the New York Telephone Company, Tulane University's board of visitors, The Key Bank National Association, Golub, Inc., the Corporation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, NPR, and COMSAT. Wharton was also served on the board of the Michigan Council on the Arts, the Aspen Institute, the Asia Society, CSIS, the SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, the New York City Center, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Glimmerglass Opera, among others. Wharton has been awarded nine honorary degrees.

Wharton and her husband, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., have two sons, Clifton Wharton III and Bruce Wharton.

Dolores Wharton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 14, 2016 and October 4, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dolores D. Wharton was conducted by Harriette Cole on July 14, 2016 and October 4, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 11 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic leader Dolores D. Wharton (1927 - ) was the first woman, and the first African American, elected to the boards of Michigan Bell Telephone Company, Kellogg Company, Phillips Petroleum Company, and Gannett Company.

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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:

Wharton, Dolores D.

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Foundation Chief Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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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 Dolores D. Wharton, July 14, 2016 and October 4, 2016. 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 Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:33 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton was born on July 7, 1927 in New York City to Josephine Bradford Owens and V. Kenneth Duncan. Wharton's great-great grandfather was Thomas Bradford, a free man who was the butler for Maryland Governor Augustus Bradford. Wharton's mother was raised by her maternal grandfather, James T. Bradford, a prosperous Baltimore grocer; and attended Temple University. Wharton's father was related to an African American state senator in South Carolina during Reconstruction. Her paternal family was of mixed race, and her grandmother, Cora Duncan, passed for white while travelling abroad. Wharton's father and his brother, Jack Duncan, founded Duncan Brothers Funeral Home in Harlem, New York. Her parents married in the early 1920s, and she and her brother, John Duncan III, were raised in Harlem, where her neighbor was dentist Henry Beard Delany, Jr. She recalls the Joe Louis and Max Schmeling fight, and family vacations to Akron, Pennsylvania during the summer.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:04 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton was raised in a four-story building in Harlem, New York City that also housed her father's firm,

Duncan Brothers Funeral Home. In 1932, she enrolled at the Little Red School House, a progressive private school run by Elisabeth Irwin. The curriculum focused on education through experience, as well as the fine arts. Wharton was active in her community; and frequented the West 137th Street Branch YWCA, went horseback riding in Long Island and saw movies at the RKO Alhambra. When Wharton's parents divorced in the late 1930s, she moved with her mother and brother to Bethel, Connecticut. Her mother then married James W. Owens, a musician who trained at The Julliard School and inherited a fortune from his father, and the family settled in Danbury, Connecticut. There, Wharton attended Main Street School and Danbury High School, where she was a student representative for the American Red Cross. Wharton remembers millionaires C.B. Powell and Philip H.M. Savory, who were acquaintances of her parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:01 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton moved to Bethel, Connecticut after her parents' divorce, and her mother, Josephine Bradford Owens, left the Episcopal church. Wharton's mother married James W. Owens, who was seventeen years her junior, and the family moved to a house on Lake Kenosia in Danbury, Connecticut. Marian Anderson, who was a high school friend of her mother, lived nearby on the Marianna Farm estate with her husband, Orpheus H. Fisher. As a teenager, Wharton began to study modern dance in Danbury; and visited her cousin, Betty Fitzgerald, at Radcliffe College, where she attended a dance with Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. Wharton attended New York University, but returned to Danbury to live with her mother, after her stepfather and brother, John Duncan III, joined the U.S. Army during World War II. After the war ended, she went back to New York City, and took dance classes at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre with Martha Graham. Wharton began dating Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. in 1949, and they married in 1950.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:05 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton married Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. in

1950 at the studio of Marian Anderson in Danbury, Connecticut. The wedding was officiated by Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop, and the guests included C.B. Powell and Gerri Major. Wharton and her husband then moved to the Riverton Houses in New York City, and their first son, Clifton R. Wharton III, was born in 1952. Wharton worked at Lord and Taylor in sales, while her husband worked in Latin America for Nelson Rockefeller. Wharton's husband then enrolled at the University of Chicago to obtain his Ph.D. degree in economics, and worked as a graduate student for Theodore W. Schultz. There, she completed her undergraduate degree in art history as well. After Wharton's husband completed his coursework, they returned to New York City briefly, before moving to Singapore, where her husband taught agriculture development as an associate for the Rockefeller Foundation. There, they had their second son, Bruce Wharton.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section  
A2016\_001\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:43 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton and her family lived in Singapore and Malaysia during the early 1960s. She studied Malaysian art, and began working on the book 'Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A Biographic Survey.' She also developed a dance program at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. While abroad, Wharton's son, Clifton R. Wharton III, attended the Singapore American School and the Alice Smith School in Malaysia. She returned to the United States in 1964, and lived in New York City, where her sons attended The Dalton School. In 1970, Wharton's husband was chosen as president of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, becoming the first African American president at an integrated research university. There, Wharton met celebrities like Walter Cronkite, displayed faculty art work at the Alice B. Cowles House, and was appointed to the Michigan Council for the Arts in 1971. During the Vietnam War protests, Wharton held informal discussions with students about her experiences in Southeast Asia.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section  
A2016\_001\_001\_006, TRT: 6:27:39 2016/07/14

Dolores D. Wharton accompanied her husband, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. on a speaking tour of Michigan universities. During his presidency at Michigan State University, she led a fundraising drive to raise \$18 million for a new arts building, which was later named the Clifton and Dolores Wharton Center for Performing Arts. Wharton joined the boards of Michigan Bell Telephone Company, Phillips Petroleum Company, and Michigan National Bank. In 1978, her husband became president of the State University of New York System (SUNY), and the family moved to Albany, New York. Wharton faced initial challenges there, as the president's house required remodeling, and she was not welcomed by the president of one SUNY campus, while visiting with her husband. In Albany, she joined the boards of the Golub Corporation, the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Telephone Company. In 1980, Wharton founded the Fund for Corporate Initiatives, which aimed to increase the hiring of women and minorities in the corporate world.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_002\_007, TRT: 7:29:48 2016/10/04

Dolores D. Wharton was elected to the board of the Michigan Bell Telephone Company in 1974, becoming the first African American woman to serve. In this role, she was a member of several committees, and worked with company shareholders. When Wharton moved to Albany, New York, she joined the board of the New York Telephone Company, of which Franklin A. Thomas was also a member. In 1976, Wharton joined the board of the Phillips Petroleum Company, headquartered in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. At the time, the company was recovering from a scandal resulting from the chairman's illegal campaign contribution to President Richard Milhous Nixon. When the company made a major oil discovery in Ekofisk, off the coast of Norway, Wharton requested to visit the site, and traveled to Norway with the board. She recalls interviewing the Phillips Petroleum Company workers in Norway about the workplace culture and the danger of working on an oil rig.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_002\_008, TRT: 8:30:08 2016/10/04



Dolores D. Wharton served on the board of directors for the Kellogg Company and the Phillips Petroleum Company in the 1970s, alongside former U.S. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and lawyer Clark Clifford. She founded The Kellogg Company's social responsibility committee, which focused on hiring more women and minorities. In 1979, while living in Albany, New York, Wharton joined the board of Gannett Company, Inc., which was led by CEO Allen Neuharth. During her years there, the company launched the USA Today daily newspaper. Wharton also joined not-for-profit boards, including the Albany Institute of History and Art, and the Albany Law School. She founded the Fund for Corporate Interns, Inc. in 1980, whose mission was to help women and minorities obtain executive positions. Wharton coordinated with universities near Albany, and organized seminars where business leaders addressed interns. Later in the 1980s, she expanded the organization, and partnered with the Aspen Institute to create a fellowship program.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_002\_009, TRT: 9:28:17 2016/10/04

Dolores D. Wharton founded the Young Executive Program, a leadership development seminar, in 1984. Wharton recruited corporate leaders like Phillips Talbot, Darwin N. Davis, Sr. and her husband, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., to speak to young executives. She initially opened the program only to women and minorities, but eventually admitted white male participants. Wharton and her husband moved to New York City in 1986, where he acted as chairman and CEO of TIAA-CREF. Throughout the 1980s, she worked on the board of The Kellogg Company; and in 1988, visited South Africa to research whether Kellogg should divest during apartheid. Wharton consulted with Chris Dlamini, head of the union at Kellogg's South Africa plant, who was often arrested by the apartheid government for working with the company. She also met with Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Albertina Sisulu, an anti-apartheid activist on house arrest in Soweto, South Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_002\_010, TRT: 10:29:09 2016/10/04

Dolores D. Wharton resigned from the board of Phillips Petroleum Company in 1993, due to concerns of a conflict of interest created by her husband's appointment as deputy secretary of state in President Bill Clinton's administration. During her husband's service, she befriended former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and his wife, Grace Sloane Vance. After her husband resigned in 1993, they returned to New York City. During the 1990s, Wharton served on the board of directors for the Communications Satellite Corporation, the Museum of Modern Art, and the New York City Center. After the death of their son, Clifton Wharton III, in 2000, Wharton and her husband partnered with Enoch Pratt Free Library and the theater program at Towson University in Maryland to create a children's reading program. She retired from the Fund for Corporate Initiatives, Inc. in 2001. Wharton describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and her plans for the future; and reflects upon her life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores D. Wharton, Section A2016\_001\_002\_011, TRT: 11:22:45 2016/10/04

Dolores D. Wharton narrates her photographs.