

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gates, Yvonne Atkinson, 1956-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates,
Dates:	September 25, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:25:14).
Abstract:	Political leader Yvonne Atkinson Gates (1956 -) represented District D on the Clark County Board of Commissioners, where she was the first African American woman to serve as chair. Gates was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 25, 2016, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_061
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Political leader Yvonne Atkinson Gates was born on June 10, 1956 in Henderson, Nevada to Bobbie Davis Atkinson and Eddie Atkinson. Gates graduated from Ed W. Clark High School in Las Vegas and went on to earn her B.S. degree in political science and journalism in 1979, her M.P.A. degree in 1982, and her Ph.D. degree in public administration in 2012, all from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Following her graduation from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Gates

worked as the research and planning manager for Clark County's Department of Social Service, as well as personnel manager for Clark County's Department of Aviation. From 1985 to 1992, Gates served on the Clark County School District Board of Trustees in Las Vegas. In 1992, Gates was elected as the youngest and only minority member to serve on the Clark County Board of Commissioners for District D in Las Vegas, becoming its first African American female chair in 1995. She was chosen as a super-delegate for the Democratic National Committee; and, in 2002, she chaired the Democratic National Committee Black Caucus. As chairwoman, she worked with black female elected officials like Donna Brazile and Minyon Moore to found the Women Building for the Future Political Action Committee. Throughout her political career, Gates advocated for strengthening public education and daycare programs nationwide. After resigning from the Clark County Board of Commissioners in 2007, Gates was appointed by Senator Harry Reid to serve as a Democratic National Committee super-delegate in 2008 for Hillary Rodham Clinton, although Gates later shifted her support to Barack Obama. In addition to her political career, Gates founded the construction firm of ECO Construction LLC in Las Vegas.

Gates was a recipient of the Community Image Award from the Professional Black Women Alliance in 1989, and a recipient of the Community Service Award from the Westcoast Black Publisher's Association in 1990. In recognition of her public service, the Clark County Board of School Trustees opened the Yvonne Atkinson Gates Center in 1996. In 1997, Gates was named Outstanding Democrat of the Year by the Democratic Party of Nevada. In 2002, she received an Eleanor Roosevelt Award from the DNC Women's Vote Center; and in 2006, she received a human rights award from Church Women United.

Gates and her husband, former Judge Lee Gates, have four children.

Yvonne Atkinson Gates was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 25, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 25, 2016, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Political leader Yvonne Atkinson Gates (1956 -) represented District D on the Clark County Board of Commissioners, where she was the first African American woman to serve as chair.

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:

Gates, Yvonne Atkinson, 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

County Commissioner

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, September 25, 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).

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 The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, Section A2016_061_001_001, TRT: 1:31:19 2016/09/25

Yvonne Atkinson Gates was born on June 10, 1956 in Henderson, Nevada to Bobbie Davis Atkinson and Eddie Atkinson. Her father was born in 1919 in Warren, Arkansas. He served in the U.S. military during World War II, and then became a brick mason. He eventually moved west to Las Vegas, Nevada, where he met Gates' mother, who was also from Warren. Gates' maternal grandfather, George Davis, worked in the timber industry in Warren, while her grandmother, Pearl Davis, was a homemaker. In the 1950s, they moved to Las Vegas, where he became a custodian at Ronzoni's department store. Gates was the second oldest of five children, and grew up in the predominantly black Westside of Las Vegas. She began her education at Wendell P. Williams Elementary School, and then attended Ed W. Clark High School, where she joined the student council and the track and basketball teams. Her mother worked as a casino waitress, while her father was a construction worker and custodian.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, Section A2016_061_001_002, TRT: 2:30:09 2016/09/25

Yvonne Atkinson Gates received a journalism scholarship to attend the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

There, she took courses in political science, and became a founding member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority chapter. Her classmates included the UNLV Runnin' Rebels basketball stars, Reggie Theus and Ricky Sobers. Aspiring to a career as an elected official, Gates campaigned locally for Assemblyman Cranford Crawford and Clark County Commissioner Woodrow Wilson. Upon graduating in 1979, she joined the City of Las Vegas' budget and finance department. Gates went on to obtain a master's degree in public administration from UNLV in 1982. Then, she began her career in the government of Clark County, Nevada, where she worked in planning, human resources and social services. Around this time, Gates became the youngest and only minority member of the Clark County Board of School Trustees. In this role, she helped secure educational funding for the county's African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, Section A2016_061_001_003, TRT: 3:27:51 2016/09/25

Yvonne Atkinson Gates served on the Clark County Board of School Trustees in Clark County, Nevada from 1985 to 1992. She was then elected to a seat on the Clark County Board of Commissioners, where she represented the two hundred thousand constituents of District D. As a commissioner, Gates advocated for the creation of early childhood education centers, and collaborated with Nevada's congressional representatives, including Shelley Berkley and Harry Reid. She also developed technical knowledge about issues that impacted the Las Vegas Strip, such as water access. She and her fellow commissioners were responsible for authorizing permits and licenses for the city's hotels, resorts and casinos. Although many of the commissioners were involved in business ventures, Gates was targeted for an ethics investigation when she tried to open a restaurant franchise. In recognition of her public service, the Clark County Board of School Trustees opened the Yvonne Atkinson Gates Center in 1996.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, Section A2016_061_001_004, TRT: 4:30:21 2016/09/25

Yvonne Atkinson Gates was elected to represent District D on the Clark County Board of Commissioners in Clark

County, Nevada in 1992. In this role, she worked to increase minority business representation at the McCarran International Airport in Paradise, Nevada. She later served as the chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee Black Caucus, where she worked with black female elected officials like Donna Brazile and Minyon Moore to found the Women Building for the Future Political Action Committee. At this point in the interview, Gates reflects upon the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004. She also talks about the influx of residents to Las Vegas from cities like Los Angeles, California. After the federal indictment of four of her fellow Clark County commissioners in 2002, Gates studied the causes of public corruption for her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In 2007, Gates resigned as county commissioner, and started ECO Construction, LLC in Las Vegas.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Yvonne Atkinson Gates, Section A2016_061_001_005, TRT: 5:25:34 2016/09/25

Yvonne Atkinson Gates was the first African American woman to serve as chairperson of the Clark County Board of Commissioners. In 2008, she was appointed by Senator Harry Reid to serve as a Democratic National Committee superdelegate for Hillary Clinton. She eventually switched her allegiance to Barack Obama, who went on to become the first African American president of the United States. At this point, Gates talks about superdelegate reform, and the movement to legalize marijuana. Gates completed her Ph.D. degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and then moved with her husband, Lee Gates, to Boulder, Colorado, where their youngest daughter completed high school. At the time of the interview in 2016, Gates supported Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, and aspired to join her administration. Gates describes her plans for the future, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.