

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sewell, Terri A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell,
Dates:	May 5, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:25:40).
Abstract:	Lawyer and political official Terri A. Sewell (1965 -) was partner at the Birmingham law firm of Maynard, Cooper & Gale, P.C. and was the first African American woman to serve in the Alabama delegation of the U.S. House of Representatives. Sewell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 5, 2017, in Birmingham, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_096
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer and political official Terri A. Sewell was born on January 1, 1965 in Huntsville, Alabama to Andrew A. Sewell and Nancy Gardner Sewell. She graduated from Selma High School in 1982, and received her B.A. degree from Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey in 1986. In 1988, Sewell received her M.A. degree from Oxford University. She then went on to attend Harvard Law School, where she earned her J.D. degree in 1992.

Sewell began her political career working for Congressman Richard Shelby and Senator Howell Helfin. After graduating from Harvard Law School, Sewell served as a law clerk to Chief Judge U.W. Clemon of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama. In 1994, Sewell began working at the law firm of Davis, Polk, & Wardwell, where she served as a securities lawyer for more than a decade. She returned to Alabama in 2004 and took a position as partner at the law offices of Maynard, Cooper, & Gale, P.C. Sewell distinguished herself as one of the few African American public finance lawyers in the State of Alabama. Her clients included the City of Selma, Dallas County Water Authority, Alabama State University, and Stillman College. In 2010, Sewell was elected to the United States House of Representatives as a representative from Alabama's 7th District and as the first African American woman to serve in the Alabama Congressional delegation. Sewell was reelected to the House of Representatives three more times.

Sewell has served in numerous organizations, including as the chair and treasurer of St. Vincent's Foundation's board, as a board member of the Girl Scouts of Cahaba Council, as a board member of the Alabama Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, on the Community Advisory Board for the University of Alabama-Birmingham Minority Health and Research Center, on the Governing Board of the Alabama Council on Economic Education, and as a member of the Corporate Council for the Birmingham Art Museum. Sewell has also provided free legal services to the homeless, mentored girls of color through Dreams into Action, and served on the Alumni Advisory Board of Sponsors of Educational Opportunity.

Sewell has been awarded for her successful career and contributions to her community. In 2005, she was named one of the “Top Birmingham Women” by the *Birmingham Business Journal*. Sewell has also been listed in the magazine, *Alabama Super Lawyers*, and was named a “Woman of Influence” by *Alabama Today*. She was also awarded the Minority Business Rising Star Award by the *Birmingham Business Journal* in 2007.

Terri A. Sewell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 3, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell was conducted by Denise Gines on May 5, 2017, in Birmingham, Alabama, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Lawyer and political official Terri A. Sewell (1965 -) was partner at the Birmingham law firm of Maynard, Cooper & Gale, P.C. and was the first African American woman to serve in the Alabama delegation of the U.S. House of Representatives.

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:

Sewell, Terri A.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Sewell, Terri A.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Lawyer

Political Official

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 Terri A. Sewell, May 5, 2017. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Terri A. Sewell, Section A2017_096_001_001, TRT: 1:30:32 ?

The Honorable Terri A. Sewell was born on January 1, 1965 in Huntsville, Alabama to Nancy Gardner Sewell and Andrew Sewell. Her mother belonged to a family of sharecroppers and ministers who lived in Lowndes County, Alabama. Sewell's maternal grandparents, Nell Gardner and Thomas Gardner III, lived in the town of Lowndesboro, and her maternal grandfather pastored the Beulah Primitive Baptist Church in Hope Hull, Alabama. Her mother graduated from Alabama State College in Montgomery, Alabama. Sewell's paternal grandmother, Admonia Accoff, lived in Selma, Alabama, where she worked in a cigar factory. Her father was raised by his mother and stepfather, Mose Accoff. Sewell's parents met at the Councill Training School in Huntsville, where her father was the head basketball coach and her mother was the librarian. When Sewell was three years old, her mother enrolled at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana to pursue a master's degree in library science.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell, Section A2017_096_001_002, TRT: 2:28:38 ?

The Honorable Terri A. Sewell's parents, Nancy Gardner Sewell and Andrew Sewell, married in Huntsville, Alabama in 1963. At the time, her Baptist maternal grandfather, Reverend Thomas Gardner III, had misgivings about Sewell's father, who was Catholic. When Sewell was two years old, her twin siblings, Andrew Sewell and Anthony Sewell, were born. Her family then returned to Selma, Alabama to care for her diabetic paternal grandmother, Admonia Accoff. They moved into an all-white neighborhood, where their home was vandalized with toilet paper. A Jewish family who moved into the neighborhood faced similar discrimination. Sewell and her siblings integrated Cedar Park Elementary School, where they became close friends with the son of the Jewish family, Eric Benn. After he was mistreated for wearing a yarmulke to school, Sewell's brothers wore them in solidarity the next day. Sewell's mother worked as a librarian at the integrated Selma Public Library, and encouraged Sewell's interest in reading.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell, Section A2017_096_001_003, TRT: 3:27:50 ?

The Honorable Terri A. Sewell entered Westside Junior High School during the mid-1970s. While there, she became increasingly involved with her mother's Jack and Jill chapter. She also played basketball, but switched to cheerleading after scoring in the opponent's basket. Sewell's junior high school graduation marked a turning point in her academic career. At that time, she had the highest grade point average in her class, but did not receive any awards due to poor behavior. Sewell went on to attend Selma High School, where she became a champion member of the debate team and was the first African American valedictorian. During her senior year of high school drew, she found it difficult to decide which college to attend, because she was offered such a large number of scholarships. After being profiled in the Montgomery Advertiser, Sewell was approached by attorney Julian McPhillips about applying to his alma mater, Princeton University. After meeting with a recruiter, she was accepted to attend.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell, Section A2017_096_001_004, TRT: 4:29:43 ?

The Honorable Terri A. Sewell was admitted with a full scholarship to attend Princeton University in 1982. Upon her arrival in Princeton, New Jersey, Sewell

was partnered with her upperclassman mentor, Michelle Obama. Sewell quickly became involved on campus, and was elected class vice president during her first year. She majored in public affairs, and studied abroad in the United Kingdom at the London School of Economics. Sewell wrote her thesis on African American women in politics and their strategic methods, and graduated from Princeton University in 1986. She was advised by Princeton University President William G. Bowen to apply for a Marshall Scholarship to the University of Oxford, as well as to Harvard Law School and Yale Law School. For the next two years, she studied at the University of Oxford alongside Bonnie St. John, Susan Rice, Maurice Jones and Lisa Cook. Additionally, Sewell talks about her experiences as a summer intern on Capitol Hill.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Terri A. Sewell, Section A2017_096_001_005, TRT: 5:28:57 ?

The Honorable Terri A. Sewell began a master's degree at the University of Oxford in 1988. While there, she mounted a production of Ntozake Shange's 'For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf' starring her friends and classmates. Sewell was admitted into Harvard Law School prior to enrolling at the University of Oxford, and deferred her entrance for two years. After graduating from the University of Oxford, she began her law degree. Her class included the future President Barack Obama, and organized protests to demand the hiring of a black female professor. Sewell deferred her studies for one year to return to England, where she edited her master's thesis for publication. After returning to Harvard Law School, Sewell edited the Harvard Civil Rights Civil Liberties Law Review and wrote for the Harvard Blackletter Journal. She graduated in 1992, and obtained a judicial clerkship under Judge U.W. Clemon.