

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruth J. Simmons

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Simmons, Ruth, 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons,
Dates:	December 3, 2019
Bulk Dates:	2019
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:14:19).
Abstract:	Academic administrator and college president Ruth J. Simmons (1945-) was the first African American woman to head a major college or university as president of Smith College, the first African American woman to head an Ivy League institution as president of Brown University, and the first woman president of Prairie View A&M University. Simmons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 3, 2019, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2019_134
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Academic administrator and college president Ruth J. Simmons was born on July 3, 1945 near Grapeland, Texas to Fanny and Isaac Stubblefield. After the family moved to Houston in 1952, Simmons graduated top of her class from Phillis Wheatley High School in 1963. She then received her B.A. degree in French from Dillard University in 1967 and her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in romance languages and literature from Harvard University in 1970 and 1973.

Simmons became as an assistant professor of French at the University of New Orleans in 1973; and, two years later, was promoted to assistant dean of their College of Liberal Arts. In 1977, she was hired by California State University, Northridge where she served as administrative coordinator for their National Endowment for the Humanities Liberal Studies Project until 1978 when she was made acting director of international programs and associate professor of Pan-African studies. In 1979, Simmons joined the University of Southern California as assistant, and then associate dean of graduate studies. She remained here until 1983 when she was hired by Princeton University to serve as director of studies for their new residential college, Butler College. From 1985 to 1987 she also worked as their acting director of Afro-American studies; and, in 1986, she was promoted to associate dean of faculty at Princeton University. Simmons subsequently served as provost of Spelman College from 1990 to 1991 before returning to Princeton as vice provost. In 1995, Simmons became the first African American woman to head a major college or university upon being named president of Smith College. Here, she established the first engineering program at a woman's college. She held this position until 2001 when she was selected president of Brown University, making her the first African American woman to head an Ivy League institution. Here, she raised a record amount of funding for the school and established a need-blind admission standard for undergraduates. In 2012, she stepped down as president of Brown, but remained as a professor of comparative literature and Africana studies. Simmons subsequently became interim president of Prairie View

A&M University in 2017 before being named president of the school, making her their first woman president.

Simmons has served on numerous boards throughout her career, including for JSTOR, Pfizer, Inc., Texas Instruments, Goldman Sachs, Howard University, Mondelez International, Chrysler, LLC, and Princeton University. She has also been a presidential appointee for President Bill Clinton's Women's Progress Commemoration Commission in 1999 and President Barack Obama's Commission on White House Fellowships in 2009.

Simmons has over thirty honorary degrees and has received many awards such as CBS's Woman of the Year in 1996, the National Urban League's Achievement Award in 1998, the United Negro College Fund's President's Award in 2001, the Fulbright Lifetime Achievement Medal in 2002, and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2010.

Simmons resides in Texas and has two adult children, Khari and Maya.

Ruth J. Simmons was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 3, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ruth J. Simmons was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 3, 2019, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Academic administrator and college president Ruth J. Simmons (1945-) was the first African American woman to head a major college or university as president of Smith College, the first African American woman to head an Ivy League institution as president of Brown University, and the first woman president of Prairie View A&M University.

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:

Simmons, Ruth, 1945-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Simmons, Ruth, 1945---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

College President

Academic Administrator

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Ruth J. Simmons, December 3, 2019. 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 Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_001, TRT: 1:32:56 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_002, TRT: 2:37:07 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_003, TRT: 3:41:43 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_004, TRT: 4:42:22 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_005, TRT: 5:31:18 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth J. Simmons, Section A2019_134_001_006, TRT: 6:08:53 ?