

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Alexander, Ethel Skyles, 1925-2016
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander,
Dates:	April 2, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:04:15).
Abstract:	State representative and state senator The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander (1925 - 2016) was known for waving a red handkerchief in the air whenever she wanted to discuss an issue with fellow legislators, and served as vice chair of the Elections and Reapportionment Committee in the Illinois State Senate. She co-sponsored a bill that prohibited state agencies from trading with apartheid-era South Africa and sponsored legislation that toughened child pornography laws. Alexander was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 2, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_080
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ethel Skyles Alexander was born on January 16, 1925 in Chicago, Illinois. Her father, Charles Skyles, a minister, went on in 1945 to become a member of the Illinois General Assembly. Alexander moved with her family to Davenport, Iowa, and to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, due to her father's parish assignments. Returning to Chicago, Alexander attended Sherwood Elementary School and Englewood High School. After completing high school, she had one child, Gayla Aniece.

Alexander worked as a clerk in the Cook County Circuit Court's Records Department for thirty-three years. She was the first woman to be appointed Assistant Chief Deputy Clerk of the Criminal Division of the Circuit Court. Alexander returned to school, receiving her B.A. from Loop College (now Harold Washington), as well as enrolling in an IBM Executive Training Course.

In 1978, Alexander was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. She was known for waving a red handkerchief in the air whenever she wanted to discuss an issue with fellow legislators. In 1986, Alexander was appointed to replace the late Charles Chew in the State Senate, where she remained until she retired in 1993. While in the legislature, Alexander served as vice-chair of the Elections and Reapportionment Committee. She co-sponsored a bill that prohibited state agencies from trading with apartheid-era South Africa and sponsored legislation that toughened child pornography laws.

Alexander passed away on September 10, 2016 at age 91.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 2, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. State representative and state senator The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander (1925 - 2016) was known for waving a red handkerchief in the air whenever she wanted to discuss an issue with fellow legislators, and served as vice chair of the Elections and Reapportionment Committee in the Illinois State Senate. She co-sponsored a bill that prohibited state agencies from trading with apartheid-era South Africa and sponsored legislation that toughened child pornography laws.

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:

Alexander, Ethel Skyles, 1925-2016

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Haynes, Frank (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Alexander, Ethel Skyles, 1925-2016--Interviews

African American state legislators--Illinois--Interviews

Illinois Legislative Black Caucus

Politicians--Illinois

Illinois. Circuit Court (Cook County)

Illinois. General Assembly. House of Representatives

Illinois. General Assembly. Senate

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Illinois

Illinois

Occupations:

State Representative

State Senator

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 Ethel Skyles Alexander, April 2, 2001. 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 Ethel Skyles Alexander, Section A2001_080_001_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Ethel Skyles Alexander details her family background and her family life growing up in Chicago. Alexander's father was a state politician, and Alexander tells stories of his service in Springfield and profiles some of the other black representatives he worked with, including Corneal Davis and Fred Smith. Alexander also details the changing political climate in Chicago during the 1940s and 1950s, when her father was serving as a politician.

African American state legislators--Illinois--Interviews.

Illinois Legislative Black Caucus.

Politicians--Illinois.

Illinois. Circuit Court (Cook County).

Illinois. General Assembly. House of Representatives.

Illinois. General Assembly. Senate.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander, Section A2001_080_001_002, TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Ethel Skyles Alexander describes her education, from Sherwood Elementary and Englewood High School on Chicago's South Side, to Loop Junior College in Chicago. Alexander then explains how her father helped get her a job at the Circuit Court of Cook County, where she held a post for over three decades. Alexander then talks about how she first got into state politics, detailing her first election, which she lost, then explaining how she won in her second attempt to become a state representative. Alexander shares many stories about her time as a representative, profiling Illinois politicians like Harold Washington and Charles Chew.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander, Section A2001_080_001_003, TRT: 0:31:04 ?

Ethel Skyles Alexander discusses in detail her time in the Illinois General Assembly, naming many of the influential black politicians with whom she worked, and telling of her participation in important votes and tactics she used when dealing with lobbyists and fellow legislators. Alexander also explains the importance of the General Assembly to blacks living in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ethel Skyles Alexander, Section A2001_080_001_004, TRT: 0:31:08 ?

Ethel Skyles Alexander discusses the importance of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and comments on the legacy of herself and other black members of the Illinois General Assembly.