

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dellums, Leola, 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums,
Dates:	June 12, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:14:38).
Abstract:	Civic leader Leola "Roscoe" Dellums (1941 -) worked as a reporter and broadcaster for various news programs throughout the Washington metro area until she began her career in law specializing in government relations and lobbying. She has also written television scripts, songs and poetry. Dellums was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_130
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Leola "Roscoe" Dellums was born in Berkeley, California, on December 12, 1941, representing the third generation of her family to live there. Dellums' mother, Esther L. Higgs, was a musician and early crusader in the civil rights movement, and her father, Leo, was the first African American realtor in California. Dellums traces her ancestry back to Revolutionary War veterans. While attending high school, Dellums was a regular on TV's *Dance Party* and was inducted into the National Thespian Society. In 1959, she went to San Francisco State University, where she became the first black pom-pom girl and the first African American on the homecoming court. Dellums left school in 1962 to marry, and returned several years later to earn a B.A. in sociology. She later earned a J.D. from Georgetown University.

Dellums' early career found her teaching English as a second language in 1966, as well as working in television in both California and Washington, D.C. By 1974, she had combined the two into consulting on educational television programs in the D.C. area. She also worked as a reporter and broadcaster for various news programs throughout the Washington metro area from 1972 into the 1980s. In 1976, Dellums joined the American Civil Liberties Union as a publicist and remained there for two years. Dellums went to the House of Representatives in 1983 to work as a special assistant to Representative Mickey Leland, and in 1984 became a judicial law clerk in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. From 1985 to 1992, Dellums worked in the California Assembly Office of Research as a consultant to state representatives in Washington and leadership in California. Beginning her legal practice in 1993, Dellums went to work at Washington & Christian, specializing in government relations and lobbying. In 1995, she opened her own law firm.

In addition to her extensive experience in a wide variety of fields, Dellums has published poetry and written songs and also wrote the script for a Disney Channel movie about her family. She is the recipient of a Solid Image Award and the National Sojourner Truth Meritorious Service Award and is listed in *Who's Who Among Black Americans*.

She is a board member of the Brady Campaign Against Gun Violence, the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame National Advisory Board, and a former member of the San Francisco State University Alumni Board.

Dellums was married to California Congressman Ronald V. Dellums for thirty-seven years. She has three children and three grandchildren.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civic leader Leola "Roscoe" Dellums (1941 -) worked as a reporter and broadcaster for various news programs throughout the Washington metro area until she began her career in law specializing in government relations and lobbying. She has also written television scripts, songs and poetry.

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:

Dellums, Leola, 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dellums, Leola, 1941---Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

African American television journalists--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, June 12, 2003. 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 Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_001, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums was born on December 12, 1941 in Berkeley, California to Esther Lee and Leo C. Higgs. Dellums can trace her maternal family back to the Revolutionary War when a white seaman and a North African woman, settled in Virginia and their offspring, Officer Holcomb, fought in the war. Dellums' maternal great-grandmother, Mary Wanzer Jones, escaped from slavery using the Underground Railroad and married Reverend J.W. Jones in Ann Arbor, Michigan before they relocated to Berkeley. Wanzer's brothers fought in the Civil War and Dellums discovered records of Amos Wanzer's fight for his pension since he had syphilis. Her grandmother, Esther Jones Lee, married George Lee in 1903, was an educator and active in the Phillis Wheatley clubs, the Linden Branch YMCA, and the Anti-Lynch Campaign in California. Lee was friends with California Governor and Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren and was one of the first black women to apply for membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American television journalists--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_002, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums describes her family background. Her maternal great-grandfather, Reverend J.W. Jones, was related to the prominent abolitionist and Chicago businessman, John Jones. Dellums' grandmother, Esther Jones participated in the National Council of Negro Women, and Dellums recalls meeting Mary McLeod Bethune and Mary Church Terrell at her grandmother's, Esther Jones Lee's, National Council of Negro Women meetings. Esther Jones Lee was called the "one woman picket" for calling Governor Earl Warren when she was refused service at restaurants in Sacramento, California. Dellums' father, Leo C. Higgs, had African American and Native American ancestry. Her father was born in 1892 in Des Moines, Iowa, attended Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, worked on his M.B.A degree at Stanford University, and served in World War I. He was one of the first black realtors in California and instrumental in passing Fair Housing Legislation. Dellums describes how her parents met and subsequently had many daughters.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_003, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums remembers growing up with piano music and many string instruments in Berkeley, California during a time of great change including World War II and McCarthyism. Dellums attended Longfellow Elementary School and Burbank Junior High School where she was surrounded by Asian, Hispanic, white and black children. In addition to being a good student, Dellums was active at the McGee Avenue Baptist Church and involved in community service. At Berkeley High School, Dellums' ninth grade teacher was fired for being a suspected Communist. In high school, she founded a black social club for girls, ran for class office, and participated in theater. Although her

mother encouraged her to go to Mills College, Dellums chose San Francisco State University where she met her future husband, HistoryMaker Ron Dellums and other notable African Americans like Bill Russell, Danny Glover, and Huey Newton.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_004, TRT: 0:31:13 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums describes socializing with athletes such as Rafer Johnson, O.J. Simpson, Frank Robinson, and Vada Pinson while attending San Francisco State University. Dellums married her husband, HistoryMaker Ron Dellums in 1962 while she was in college. Dellums recalls that her interest in the Civil Rights Movement was influenced by the Japanese internment camps and the murder of Emmett Till. However, she was shielded from the racial discrimination experienced by HistoryMakers Lalita Tademy and Ernest Green in other parts of California because she grew up in progressive Berkeley, California. Dellums was active in the Civil Rights Movement due to appearances in Berkeley by Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and HistoryMaker Sonia Sanchez. In addition to learning from her grandmother, Esther Jones Lee, Dellums was also heavily influenced by the writings of James Baldwin, black pride, and PBS documentaries. After serving on Berkeley City Council, Ron Dellums was elected to Congress in 1970.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_005, TRT: 0:30:06 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums describes the Afro-American Society which was founded by Ron Karenga and others to promote unity, culture, and black pride among the African-American community. Dellums recalls how the organization was tracked by J. Edgar Hoover. In the 1960s, Dellums worked with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the ACLU on free speech issues. Dellums worked toward social justice with Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary Church Terrell, Coretta Scott King and HistoryMakers Angela Davis, Howard Moore and Reverend Jesse Jackson, all of whom helped during her husband's U.S. Congressional race in 1970. Dellums also credits her family with helping to convince voters who thought Ron Dellums was too radical which enabled him to win in the primary over incumbent Jeffrey Cohelan. Dellums talks about the Peace and Freedom Party, a radical third party which split the Democratic vote and contributed to Ronald Reagan's election as California governor. She also comments on how black people are marginalized in social movements.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_006, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums describes her life in Washington, D.C. as a Congressman's wife. Dellums tells of being a wife of one of the few black Congressman and how she was required to show identification while the white political wives did not. She also recalls making a public comment about how the Women's National Democratic Club had traditions reminiscent of the Old South which offended many of its members. Dellums also talks about comments she made on The Phil Donahue Show. Dellums shares how her husband HistoryMaker Ron Dellums handled representing his majority white Congressional district while also being a national representative of black America. Dellums comments on the conservatism of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and waxes nostalgic about the decline of previously vibrant black neighborhoods. Dellums was active in black social clubs and befriended many of Washington D.C.'s black elites. Leola "Roscoe" Dellums also earned her J.D. degree from Georgetown Law School.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_007, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Leola “Roscoe” Dellums talks about working as a lobbyist for San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown and then working for a law firm in the artist development division. Dellums recounts the story of hosting an exchange student through the American Field Experience program. Dellums was surprised to be matched with an Afrikaner from Swaziland. Dellums had planned a welcome party filled with African regalia and drums, so the guests were shocked when a white teenager showed up. The exchange student was also surprised because she had assumed that a Congressman’s family would be white. Dellums introduced the student to her husband, HistoryMaker Ron Dellums who was an anti-apartheid advocate. Despite the dicey political situation, the student and the Dellums family grew close and the story was made into a Disney Channel movie called “The Color of Friendship.” Dellums talks about her children and grandchildren and her hopes and concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_008, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Leola “Roscoe” Dellums sees her legacy as friendship, service, and family. Dellums would like to be remembered as someone trustworthy who brought joy and happiness to others while making the world a better place. Dellums concludes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Leola "Roscoe" Dellums, Section A2003_130_001_009, TRT: 0:14:23 ?

Leola "Roscoe" Dellums narrates her photographs.