

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hassan-Fletcher, Bernyce Ayesha, 1922-2015
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 14, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:10:19).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Presidential secretary Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher (1922 - 2015 ) was one of the first African American women to work the telephone switchboards in Berkeley. Hassan-Fletcher became the accountant for the largest co-op in the city of Berkeley and later became the office manager to First Lady Nancy Reagan. Hassan-Fletcher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 14, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_200
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Bernice Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher was born in Philadelphia on December 29, 1922. Her parents were immigrants, her mother from Jamaica and her father from Eritrea. Hassan-Fletcher graduated from West Philadelphia High School and immediately went to work following graduation.

With the United States' entry into World War II, opportunities for women to join the workforce were abundant. Moving to Berkeley, California, Hassan-Fletcher became a bookkeeper on a naval base in Oakland. Following the war, she went to work for the phone company, becoming one of the first African American women to work the telephone switchboards in Berkeley. Later, using her bookkeeping skills, Hassan-Fletcher became the accountant for the largest co-op in the city of Berkeley. After marrying Arthur Fletcher in 1964, she became the office manager of Berkeley High School.

Hassan-Fletcher and her husband moved to Washington D.C., where she became involved with the Model Cities Program that was part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. In 1968, she became the campaign manager for her husband's bid for lieutenant governor. In 1970, she became the office manager of her husband's consulting firm, Hassan-Fletcher & Associates. With the election of President Ronald Reagan, Hassan-Fletcher became the office manager to First Lady Nancy Reagan. Hassan-Fletcher was the first African American woman to hold this post. She returned to Fletcher & Associates following the Reagan administration.

In her spare time, Hassan-Fletcher loves to cook, baking breads and pastries as gifts during the holiday season. Hassan-Fletcher and her husband have three children, nine grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren.

Hassan-Fletcher passed away on October 15, 2015.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 14, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Presidential secretary Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher (1922 - 2015 ) was one of the first African American women to work the telephone switchboards in Berkeley. Hassan-Fletcher became the accountant for the largest co-op in the city of Berkeley and later became the office manager to First Lady Nancy Reagan.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Hassan-Fletcher, Bernyce Ayesha, 1922-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hassan-Fletcher, Bernyce Ayesha, 1922-2015--Interviews

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Government employees--Interviews

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African American executives--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Office of the First Lady

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## Occupations:

Civic Leader

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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## 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 Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher, June 14, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher, Section A2003\_200\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher was born on December 29, 1922 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her father, Salam Hassan, emigrated from Italian Somaliland to the United States in 1920, but was deported when Hassan-Fletcher was six years old. He spoke Italian and had been employed at Sun Shipyard in Chester, Pennsylvania. The family stopped receiving letters from him in the mid-1930s. Hassan-Fletcher's birth name is Ayesha, an Arabic name taken from her Ethiopian paternal grandmother. She changed it because it embarrassed her. Hassan-Fletcher's mother, Elizabeth Walker, was born in Eastwick, Pennsylvania in 1903. Her father was a native of Kingston, Jamaica and her maternal family was from North Carolina. Walker worked as a homemaker, was an active participant in community affairs and wrote for an African American newspaper. Hassan-Fletcher was raised in Eastwick where the family lived with her maternal grandmother until her mother remarried when Hassan-Fletcher was thirteen years old.

Government employees--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher, Section A2003\_200\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher was raised in Eastwick, Pennsylvania. She attended Beulah Baptist Church in Philadelphia, McKean Elementary School in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, and West Philadelphia High School. Hassan-Fletcher dropped out of high school prematurely to care for her siblings. Post high-school, she worked for three different Philadelphia newspapers until 1950 when she moved to California with her first husband. After her divorce, she married HistoryMaker Arthur Fletcher in 1964, and relocated to Washington state where she worked for the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington. In 1968, Fletcher ran for lieutenant governor of Washington. Hassan-Fletcher worked briefly for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and in 1981, joined the Reagan administration as an administrative assistant to Nancy Reagan, making her the first black woman to hold that position. Her husband served as Chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights during George H.W. Bush's administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher, Section A2003\_200\_001\_003, TRT: 0:10:57 ?

Bernyce Ayesha Hassan-Fletcher talks about her Eritrean and Ethiopian features and indifference toward racial classifications and explains why children are attracted to her. Hassan-Fletcher talks about Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and meeting civil rights organizers including Fannie Lou Hamer and Earl "Fatha" Hines, who had been married to a close friend of hers. She describes her concerns for the African American community, specifically a lack of African American representation in politics, and reflects upon her legacy.