

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roma Jones Stewart

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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>	Stewart, Roma Jones
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Roma Jones Stewart,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 3, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:12:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	State solicitor general Roma Jones Stewart (1936 - ) served as the director of the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Stewart was later appointed as Illinois Solicitor General and is a past president of the Afro-American Genealogical and Historical Society of Chicago. Stewart was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 3, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_261
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney, Illinois solicitor general and genealogical researcher Roma Jones Stewart was born on August 10, 1936, in Chicago. Although Stewart's father, Sidney A. Jones, became judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County and one of the first African American members of the Chicago Bar Association, she never thought she would become a lawyer. The guests in her childhood home included Paul Robeson and Thurgood Marshall. Stewart attended mostly white Kosminski Elementary School and Hyde Park High School, graduating in 1954. At Fisk University, Edward Pessan taught her and she attended lectures by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and African American women's activist Anna Arnold Hedgemon. She graduated cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa in 1957.

Stewart married former husband, Ronald, in 1960 and together they lived with their children in Japan and Burma. Returning to the United States, Stewart entered Georgetown Law School, earning a J. D. in 1972. She clerked for District of Columbia Superior Court Judge Harry T. Alexander in 1973 and moved on to the District of Columbia's Corporation Council as a prosecutor. In 1976, Stewart joined Hudson, Leftwich and Davenport where she handled federal employment discrimination cases, eventually establishing her own practice. Some of her cases include: *Love vs. Pullman Co.* (1976), *Murray vs. Rumsfeld* (1981), and *Hunt vs. Chicago Housing Authority* (1987).

Stewart was appointed director of the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Health Education and Welfare in 1979. In 1987, she was appointed solicitor general of Illinois by Illinois Attorney General Neil F. Hartigan.

Now, Stewart continues as a civil rights attorney with a profound interest in African American history, especially genealogy. She is past president of the Afro-American Genealogical and Historical Society of Chicago and the author of *Africans in Georgia: 1870* and *Liberia Genealogical Research*.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Roma Jones Stewart was conducted by Sandra Ford Johnson on November 3, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. State solicitor general Roma Jones Stewart (1936 - ) served as the director of the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Stewart was later appointed as Illinois Solicitor General and is a past president of the Afro-American Genealogical and Historical Society of Chicago.

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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:

Stewart, Roma Jones

Johnson, Sandra Ford (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Stewart, Roma Jones--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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Illinois

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### Occupations:

State Solicitor General

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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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 Roma Jones Stewart, November 3, 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 Roma Jones Stewart, Section A2003\_261\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Roma Jones Stewart describes her family background. Stewart was born on August 10, 1936 in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother, Roma Lawson Jones, was also born in Chicago. Her father, Sidney Jones, Jr. was born in Sandersville, Georgia.

After extensive genealogical research, Stewart traced her paternal ancestors to 1740 and found a document granting emancipation to her great-great grandfather in 1790. Her earliest relatives were Jack Early and his wife, Violet, from Bedford County, Virginia. Stewart also found newspaper coverage of the death of her uncle, Gus Canada, in 1870 in Fort Wayne, Indiana and another great-uncle Robert Early who was a stage coach driver. Stewart describes the book she is writing on her ancestors, Jeremiah and Sophia Bunn, who were light-skinned enough for many descendants to pass as white. Stewart also describes how she conducted research on her ancestors who fought in the Civil War. As a child, Stewart recalls visiting her grandparents' house in Michigan during the summer.

Video Oral History Interview with Roma Jones Stewart, Section A2003\_261\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Roma Jones Stewart describes her father's legal career. Sidney A. Jones began practicing law in 1933, and he was one of the first African Americans to be admitted to the Chicago Bar Association. Stewart remembers visiting museums while growing up in the racially diverse neighborhood of Hyde Park in Chicago, Illinois. Her family emphasized cultural exposure and political discussion around the dinner table and hosted like Paul Robeson and Thurgood Marshall. As one of the only black students who attended Kosminski Elementary School, Stewart was placed in remedial classes due to her race. Despite average grades at Hyde Park High School, she scored highly on placement exams and enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee where she attended lectures by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Anna Arnold Hedgemon. She attended the University of Chicago Law School in 1957 but dropped out to marry Ronald Stewart and move to Tokyo, Japan. She completed her J.D. degree at Georgetown University in 1972.

Video Oral History Interview with Roma Jones Stewart, Section A2003\_261\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Roma Jones Stewart describes living in Tokyo, Japan with her husband, Ronald Stewart, during the 1960s. She describes Japanese culture, learning the language, and living abroad during the turbulent Civil Rights Movement. Upon returning to the United States and earning her J.D. degree at Georgetown University Law Center, Stewart clerked for District of Columbia Superior Court Judge Harry T. Alexander in 1973 and moved on to the District of Columbia's Corporation Council as a prosecutor. In 1976, Stewart joined Hudson, Leftwich and Davenport where she handled federal employment discrimination cases, including Love vs. Pullman Co, a 1976 case which argued that discrimination experienced by Pullman Porters on the railroad was illegal under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Stewart's firm prevailed despite the actions of Judge Alfred Arraj and the lack of union support. Stewart also represented Maryland Kemp and Idella Murray in employment discrimination lawsuits against the U.S. Department of Defense.

Video Oral History Interview with Roma Jones Stewart, Section A2003\_261\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Roma Jones Stewart remembers being admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1977 alongside her brother. Her father, Sidney Jones, Jr., participated in the ceremony, and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall hosted tea for them in his courtroom. Stewart describes being appointed director of the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Health Education and Welfare in 1979. Stewart recalls attending the U.N. Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 1987, she was appointed as the Solicitor General of the State of Illinois by Illinois Attorney General Neil F.

Hartigan. Stewart comments on her father's influence regarding authoritarianism and the Joseph McCarthy era. She also reflects upon her career success. Stewart discusses her future plans to conduct historical research and describes the books she has written on Ghana and Liberia. Stewart shares her hopes and concerns for the black community and reflects upon her legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Roma Jones Stewart, Section A2003\_261\_001\_005, TRT: 0:11:43 ?

Roma Jones Stewart narrates her photographs.