

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Mary T. Christian

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Christian, Mary T.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian,
Dates:	July 20, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:07:17).
Abstract:	Education professor and state delegate The Honorable Mary T. Christian (1924 - 2019) was the first African American to serve on the Hampton City School Board. Christian was also elected to the Virginia House of Delegates to become the first African American since reconstruction to represent the city of Hampton. Christian was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 20, 2004, in Hampton, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_100
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator and politician Mary Taylor Christian was born on August 9, 1924 in Hampton, Virginia. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a businessman. In 1941 she earned her high school diploma from Phenix High School in Hampton where she was a member of the National Honor Society, basketball, drama and debate teams. After graduation she married her high school sweetheart and by the time she was 19 she was a divorced mother of two.

While working in the laundry at Hampton University she began taking typing courses and eventually landed a secretarial job at the University. She was encouraged by her mentor to further her studies and earned her Bachelor of Science degree in education in 1955. From 1955 until 1960 she worked as a teacher at Hampton city schools. During the summers she attended Columbia University, where she earned her Masters degree in Speech and Drama in 1960. In 1968 she earned her PhD from Michigan State University while working as a professor at Hampton University. In 1968 Christian helped organize a voter registration drive at Hampton which resulted in more than a thousand people registering to vote.

In 1980 she was named the Dean of Hampton's school of education. Christian was the first African American to serve on the Hampton City School Board. She worked as a campaign manager for four political candidates and in 1985 decided to take the plunge into politics herself. In 1986 she was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and became the first African American since reconstruction to represent the state's 92nd district, the city of Hampton.

Christian served seven terms in the Virginia General Assembly where she championed legislation on education, healthcare and prescription drugs. Christian was among three African Americans appointed to the powerful House

Appropriations Committee. She also served on the Education and Rules Committees.

Christian, affectionately known by her thousands of students as "Dr. C" is professor emeritus at Hampton University. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her community and humanitarian service.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on July 20, 2004, in Hampton, Virginia, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education professor and state delegate The Honorable Mary T. Christian (1924 - 2019) was the first African American to serve on the Hampton City School Board. Christian was also elected to the Virginia House of Delegates to become the first African American since reconstruction to represent the city of Hampton.

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:

Christian, Mary T.

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Christian, Mary T.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Virginia. General Assembly. House of Delegates.

Occupations:

State Delegate

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 Mary T. Christian, July 20, 2004.
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 Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_001, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

The Honorable Mary T. Christian was born on July 9, 1924 in Hampton, Virginia. Her mother, Viola Webster Robinson, was also born in Hampton, not far from where Christian was raised with her four siblings in a supportive community on Lincoln Street. Webster Robinson took care of all the children in the neighborhood while their parents worked. Christian can trace her maternal family back to slavery. Her father, John Robinson, was illiterate, but very smart. When he was a foreman in a mine in West Virginia, he used a symbolic code to track his crew's payroll. He also organized a Negro baseball team in Hampton, sang in the Crusaders Male Chorus and enjoyed telling tall-tales. Christian could read at an early age and skipped several grades; however, she was emotionally behind her peers and felt self-conscious of her young age and small size. She came into her own at Phenix High School where she was in the National Honor Society and homecoming queen. Her whole neighborhood helped make her homecoming outfit.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_001E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_002, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

The Honorable Mary T. Christian was raised in Hampton, Virginia where she remembers hearing the sounds of roosters and chickens, and was active in her church. She first learned about racism when she observed a white child call her aunt, who was a domestic, by her first name. Christian attended Union Elementary School where she was passed over for a lead role in a school play because she was dark-skinned. She was in the National Honor Society, played basketball and ran track at George P. Phenix High School. After graduating from high school in 1941 at the age of sixteen, she got married. By the time she was nineteen, she was divorced with two young children. Christian worked in the laundry at Hampton Institute and began taking typing courses. She eventually became the secretary of a Hampton professor, who encouraged her to pursue an undergraduate degree and introduced her to her mentor, Dr. Eva C. Mitchell. Christian earned her B.S. in education in 1955 and began teaching at Aberdeen Elementary School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_002E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_003, TRT: 0:31:27 ?

The Honorable Mary T. Christian attended Columbia University in New York City during the summers starting in 1955, and earned her M.A. degree in speech and drama in 1960. In 1960, she also became a professor at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Still completing her coursework during the summers, she earned her Ph.D. in 1968 from Michigan State University in East Lansing. The same year, Christian organized a voter registration drive in Hampton's African American community. Christian observed the political activism of Hampton Institute students in the 1960s and began sporting an afro in support of a student who had been chastised for doing so. Christian organized her students to volunteer in a low-income neighborhood in the City of Hampton. In 1980, she became the dean of Hampton Institute School of Education and Human Development. After years of being politically engaged behind the scenes and serving on the Hampton School Board, Christian was persuaded to run for the Virginia General Assembly in 1985.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_003E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_004, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

The Honorable Mary T. Christian was elected to the Virginia General Assembly in 1986 and became the first African American to represent the state's 92nd district, the City of Hampton, since Reconstruction. She ran as an independent to avoid splitting the African American vote in the Democratic primary. Christian talks about the administration of the state's first African American governor HistoryMaker The Honorable L. Douglas Wilder. Christian was among three African Americans appointed to the powerful appropriations committee in the General Assembly. She considers one of her significant accomplishments to be successfully sponsoring legislation which required insurance companies to pay for bone marrow transplants. Christian reflects upon the impact of school desegregation and Virginia's government under Governor Mark Warner. She describes how she would like to be remembered, her hopes and concerns for the African American community and why history is important. Christian reflects upon her life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_004E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_005, TRT: 0:07:28 ?

The Honorable Mary T. Christian narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Mary T. Christian, Section
B2004_100_001_005E, TRT: