

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Myra McDaniel

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McDaniel, Myra, 1932-2010
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Myra McDaniel,
Dates:	February 6, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:27:04).
Abstract:	Administrative lawyer and state government appointee Myra McDaniel (1932 - 2010) was appointed the first African American woman in Texas history to serve as the Secretary of State. In this position, McDaniel was the highest-ranked African American appointee in the history of Texas government, later entering private practice as the first African American woman to lead a major law firm as managing partner. McDaniel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 6, 2007, in Austin, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_048
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Myra McDaniel was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Eva and Toronto Atwell on December 13, 1932. McDaniel attended the prestigious Philadelphia High School for Girls and went on to receive her B.A degree in English from the University of Pennsylvania in 1954. McDaniel then worked several administrative jobs at Baldwin Wallace College in Ohio and at Indiana University and received her J.D degree from the University of Texas School of Law at Austin in 1975.

McDaniel was hired by the Attorney General's Office in Texas and worked her way up to chief of the taxation division in 1979. She then worked as counsel for the Railroad Commission. McDaniel then entered private practice in Midland Texas, but Governor Mark White appointed her as General Counsel to the governor. In 1984, she became the first African American in Texas history to serve as the Secretary of State. In this position, McDaniel was also the highest- ranked African American appointee in the history of Texas government. McDaniel then entered private practice in 1987 with Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollan, Kever, and McDaniel, L.L.P., becoming the first African American woman to lead a major law firm as managing partner in 1995.

McDaniel has received numerous awards for her outstanding community service. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Bishop Quinn Foundation in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and past senior warden of Saint James Episcopal Church.

McDaniel is married to Dr. Reuben R. McDaniel, Professor of Management Science and Information Systems, at the University of Texas at Austin. McDaniel passed away on February, 25, 2010.

McDaniel was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 6, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Myra McDaniel was conducted by Denise Gines on February 6, 2007, in Austin, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Administrative lawyer and state government appointee Myra McDaniel (1932 - 2010) was appointed the first African American woman in Texas history to serve as the Secretary of State. In this position, McDaniel was the highest-ranked African American appointee in the history of Texas government, later entering private practice as the first African American woman to lead a major law firm as managing partner.

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:

McDaniel, Myra, 1932-2010

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McDaniel, Myra, 1932-2010 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Texas

Occupations:

Administrative Lawyer

State Government Appointee

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|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 Myra McDaniel, February 6, 2007. 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 Myra McDaniel, Section A2007_048_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Myra McDaniel was born on December 13, 1932 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Eva Yores Atwell and Toronto Atwell, Jr. McDaniel's maternal grandmother, Mary Moore Yores, was descended from black French immigrants, and her maternal grandfather, Edward Yores, was a railroad union secretary. Growing up in Philadelphia, McDaniel's mother was active in Zion Baptist church. McDaniel's father was also born in Philadelphia, and was the oldest of twelve children. He was a professional gambler, and impressed his children with his math skills. After McDaniel's parents separated, her mother worked as a liquor store clerk. McDaniel had two siblings, Toronto Atwell, III and Virginita Atwell Braxton. She grew up in Philadelphia, where her social life centered around Jones Tabernacle A.M.E. Church. There, McDaniel sang, played piano, performed in dramas and learned about African American history. She attended several elementary schools, and her mother brought her to the Philadelphia Orchestra to expand her education.

Video Oral History Interview with Myra McDaniel, Section A2007_048_001_002, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Myra McDaniel listened to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fireside chats on the radio during World War II. She also distributed ration tickets at school, and saw women take on a variety of careers during this time. After her parents separated when she was twelve years old, she lived with her mother and maternal grandparents. McDaniel attended the Philadelphia High School for Girls, and graduated in 1950. She received a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. During college, McDaniel lived at home, and worked for the Free Library of Philadelphia and Jones Tabernacle A.M.E. Church. In her senior year, she met her husband, Reuben R. McDaniel. They married after college, and McDaniel worked for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Naval Aviation Supply Office. McDaniel supported the Civil Rights Movement, but did not attend sit-ins after having children. Her husband was hired at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, where McDaniel became an administrative assistant.

Video Oral History Interview with Myra McDaniel, Section A2007_048_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Myra McDaniel worked at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio for Vice President Fred Harris. She impressed him with her interpersonal skills, and he allowed her to work independently. In Berea, McDaniel and her husband, Reuben R. McDaniel, joined a white discussion group about civil rights, such as the Black Panther Party. In 1969, her husband began his doctoral studies at Indiana University in Bloomington, and McDaniel became an administrative assistant in the department of structural systems technology. When her husband was hired at Florida State University in Tallahassee, her family encouraged her to return to school. She decided to pursue a law career, and was admitted to the University of Texas Law School in Austin, where her husband secured a job. She completed her degree while caring for her children; and, upon graduation, was recruited by Joe Bill Watkins to the tax division of the Texas attorney general's office, where she worked on a case against Exxon Mobil Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Myra McDaniel, Section A2007_048_001_004, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

Myra McDaniel became the chief of the tax division of the Texas attorney general's office before leaving to work for the Railroad Commission of Texas for one year. She then served as general counsel for several companies owned by a family in the oil industry, and commuted between San Antonio, Austin and Midland in Texas. In 1983, she was hired by Texas Governor Mark White as general counsel, but left in 1984 to join the law firm of Bickerstaff, Heath, Smiley, Pollan, Keever and McDaniel. Then, she was appointed as Texas secretary of state, and worked closely with the governor to represent his office

throughout Texas. She returned to the law firm as a managing partner, and explains her decision to eventually become a non-equity partner. At the firm, she defended the City of Austin in a construction case, but was unsuccessful despite mounting a strong defense. McDaniel and her husband, Reuben R. McDaniel, traveled frequently to destinations like Papua New Guinea, Thailand and Indonesia.

Video Oral History Interview with Myra McDaniel, Section A2007_048_001_005, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Myra McDaniel was upset by the lack of government preparation for Hurricane Katrina, and by its impact on residents of the Gulf Coast who were forced to abandon their homes. She also shares her frustrations with the War in Iraq that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001. McDaniel had two children with her husband, Reuben R. McDaniel. Her daughter, Diana McDaniel Rhodes, was a social worker; while her son, Reuben McDaniel III, was the president and CEO of Jackson Securities LLC, a subsidiary of Atlanta Life Financial Group. McDaniel also served as a lay eucharistic minister at St. James' Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas. She reflects upon her life; her advice for young lawyers; and how she would like to be remembered. McDaniel concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.