

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dolores R. Spikes

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Spikes, Dolores R. (Dolores Richard)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes,
Dates:	March 27, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:30:10).
Abstract:	Math professor and university president Dolores R. Spikes (1936 - 2015) served as the president of the Southern University System, and was the first woman in the United States to head a university system. She also served as the president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore from 1996 to 2001. Spikes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 27, 2008, in Baton Rouge , Louisiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_065
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Esteemed college professor and mathematician Dolores Margaret Richard Spikes was born on August 24, 1936 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Margaret and Lawrence Richard. She received her elementary and high school education by attending Baton Rouge's parochial and public school systems. Throughout her youth, Spikes' parents strongly advocated the value of a college education and upon her enrollment at Southern University in 1954, her father volunteered for overtime hours at his job to help pay for her expenses. She went on to earn her B.S. degree in mathematics in 1957 from Southern University where she was initiated as a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and met her future husband, Hermon Spikes.

After graduating, Spikes moved to Urbana, Illinois and pursued her M.S. degree in mathematics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. While pursuing her master's degree, Spikes gained a passion for teaching and decided that she would give back to her community by teaching at a historically black college. In 1958, she returned to Louisiana and accepted a teaching position at Mossville High School in Calcasien Parish. While serving in that capacity, Spikes helped to improve the school's ratings by introducing independent study programs. Then, in 1961, she returned to her alma mater, Southern University, and served as an assistant professor of mathematics.

In 1971, Spikes made history by becoming the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in mathematics from Louisiana State University. She went on to serve as the chancellor for Southern University-Baton Rouge and Southern University-New Orleans in the late 1980s. Spikes was the first female chancellor (and later, president) of a public university in the State of Louisiana. She was then appointed as a board member of Harvard University's Institute of Educational Management in 1987, and in 1988, she made history once again when she was appointed as president of Southern University and the A&M College System, becoming the first woman in the United States to head a university system. Later, in 1996, Spikes became the president of the University of Maryland-Eastern

Shore where she served until 2001.

Spikes has received numerous awards and recognitions for her accomplishments in academia, including: the Thurgood Marshall Educational Achievement Award and *Ebony* Magazine's "Most Influential Black Women in America." She has also served on the board of advisors for historically black colleges and universities; the board of directors for Education Commission of the States; and the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities.

Spikes was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 27, 2008.

Spikes passed away on June 1, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dolores R. Spikes was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 27, 2008, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Math professor and university president Dolores R. Spikes (1936 - 2015) served as the president of the Southern University System, and was the first woman in the United States to head a university system. She also served as the president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore from 1996 to 2001.

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:

Spikes, Dolores R. (Dolores Richard)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Spikes, Dolores R. (Dolores Richard)--Interviews

Aesthetics

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Southern University and A & M College

Occupations:

Math Professor

University President

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Dolores R. Spikes, March 27, 2008. 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 Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_001, TRT: 0:29:40
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Dolores R. Spikes was born on August 24, 1936 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Margaret Patterson Richard and Lawrence Granville Richard. Her maternal cousin traced their African American ancestry to 19th century South Carolina. Spikes' maternal great-grandparents lived in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, where her relatives worked in farming and construction. Her maternal grandparents moved to Baton Rouge, where her mother was born in 1918. Spikes' paternal grandfather was a teacher and rice farmer in South Louisiana, and owned land near the Mississippi River. Spikes' paternal relatives had Creole and Native American ancestry, and many had careers in mathematics or music. Her father was formally educated through the fourth grade education; and, after teaching himself arithmetic, went on to work for the Standard Oil Company. He met Spikes' mother through his brother, who married Spikes' maternal aunt. Spikes describes her likeness to her father, and talks about the cultural heritage of South Louisiana.

Adderley, Cannonball

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_002, TRT: 0:31:40
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Dolores R. Spikes grew up in a Creole community in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where her family attended the St. Francis Xavier Church. She had two younger sisters, Ann Richard Fenelon and Elizabeth Richard Bellaire; and spent her time playing basketball, making dolls from Coca-Cola bottles and visiting the circus. Spikes began her education at the all-black St. Francis Xavier Catholic School, where she first became interested in mathematics. She was also influenced by her teacher, Mildred Clark, who founded the Community Association for the Welfare of School Children. At this point in the interview, Spikes talks about the impact of urban renewal on the black community in Baton Rouge, including the demolition of St. Francis Xavier High School during the construction of Interstate 110. In addition, Spikes describes the practice of voodoo among her paternal relatives, including her cousin, Grace Valentine Johnson, who was a musician in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20
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Dolores R. Spikes attended the segregated McKinley Senior High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She played on the basketball and softball teams, and participated in oratorical contests. Upon graduating with honors in 1953, Spikes received a scholarship to Baton Rouge's Southern University, and enrolled there during the tenure of President Felton Grandison Clark. She joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and majored in mathematics. She aspired to become a

mathematics researcher, but feared she would not receive funding for graduate school, and completed a teaching certificate during her final semester. In 1957, she graduated summa cum laude, after finishing her coursework a semester early. Spikes also shares her perspective on President Clark's decision to expel sixteen student activists from Southern University in 1960, and his departure from the school one year later. She talks about the history of Louisiana's historically black universities, which relied on the segregationist state government for funding.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50
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Dolores R. Spikes obtained a fellowship in 1957 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she earned a master's degree in mathematics in 1958. During that period, she lived in the YWCA house on campus. After receiving a marriage proposal from Hermon Spikes, whom she had met in a world literature class at Southern University, she returned to South Louisiana. After marrying, Spikes taught high school mathematics for four years, and aspired to return to graduate school. She wanted to study under a professor at the University of California, Berkeley; but, in 1968, decided to enroll in a doctoral mathematics program at Louisiana State University (LSU) near her home in Baton Rouge. She completed her dissertation, 'Semi-valuations and Groups of Divisibility,' under the mentorship of Jack Ohm, and became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. degree in mathematics from LSU. She explains the topic of her dissertation, and talks about her research interests in mathematical field theory.

Advertising executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_005, TRT: 0:29:10
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Dolores R. Spikes served as both a full time faculty member and the assistant to the chancellor of Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 1982 to 1985. At that time, she became the school's vice chancellor for academic affairs. In 1987, Spikes was named to the chancellorship of Southern University at New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana. There, she updated the telephone and computer systems on campus, and extended office hours to serve the university's part time students. In 1989, Spikes became the president of the Southern University System, and the chancellor of the campus in Baton Rouge. In this role, she implemented a plan to solve the school's financial problems. She was also active in the consent decree proceedings against the State of Louisiana, where she negotiated the desegregation of the state's public universities. Spikes retired from the Southern University System in 1996.

Aerospace engineers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_006, TRT: 0:29:20
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Dolores R. Spikes served as the president of the Southern University System from 1989 to 1996. She was then approached by Chancellor Donald N. Langenberg and President William P. Hytche, Sr., who requested that Spikes assume the presidency of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne, Maryland. She served in that capacity for four years, and returned to Louisiana in 2000 due to her failing health. Throughout her academic career, Spikes was a member of the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO), which advocated for historically black colleges and universities. She talks about NAFEO's financial support of graduate programs in fields where African Americans were underrepresented, including science and

engineering. Spikes was also the first African American chairwoman of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Spikes talks about the challenges faced by organizations like NAFEO and APLU, and reflects upon her life and legacy.

Accounting--United States--History

Video Oral History Interview with Dolores R. Spikes, Section A2008_065_001_007, TRT: 0:31:10
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Dolores R. Spikes had a long career as a higher education administrator at Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. During her tenure as the vice chancellor of academic affairs, the university became the first institution of higher education to mandate community service. She also describes the school's Head Start program, which offered educational services to children and their parents. Spikes was married to Hermon Spikes, with whom she had one daughter, Rhonda Spikes Brown, who worked as a nurse. Spikes also had a granddaughter, Bianca Pete, who attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia; and a grandson, Bronson Pete, who was a teenager at the time of the interview. Spikes describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her career and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.