

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marvis Kneeland Jones

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Kneeland-Jones, Marvis, 1941- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, |
| Dates: | July 27, 2010 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2010 |
| Physical Description: | 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:06:55). |
| Abstract: | Travel agent, elementary school teacher, and public relations manager Marvis Kneeland Jones (1941 -) helped to desegregate Memphis University and worked to promote civil rights and education throughout Memphis. Kneeland-Jones was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 27, 2010, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2010_086 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Elementary school teacher, travel agent, and public relations manager Marvis Kneeland-Jones was born on February 1, 1941 in Chicago, Illinois. She was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee and graduated from Hamilton High School with honors. After the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated the desegregation of the Southern school system, Kneeland-Jones was among the first eight African American students to pass the entrance exam and enroll in Memphis State University. She and her fellow students eventually became known as the Memphis State Eight.

Kneeland-Jones graduated from Memphis State University with her B.S. degree in elementary education in 1974, after a four-year hiatus caused in part by the neglect and discrimination she experienced in her time there. During her time at Memphis State, Kneeland-Jones worked as a secretary for the NAACP. She went on to receive her M.S. degree in education and teach in the Memphis Public School system for the next twenty-five years. Kneeland-Jones also organized voter registration drives in Shelby County and worked to help her husband, Rufus E. Jones, run a successful campaign for State Representative in Tennessee, a position he held for sixteen years. Upon retirement from teaching, Kneeland-Jones went to work as Public Relations Manager for the government relations consulting company REJ & Associates, which her husband had founded.

Kneeland-Jones has been involved with numerous charitable and civic organizations, among them the Links Inc., the Friends of Memphis and Shelby County Libraries, Washington Chapel Church Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the National, Tennessee, and Memphis Education Associations. Kneeland-Jones has been awarded lifetime membership in the NAACP, has been named a Civil Rights Pioneer Honoree, and has been honored with the Arthur S. Holman Lifetime Achievement Award by her alma mater, Memphis State University. Memphis State University also established the Memphis State Eight Best Paper Prize in 2000, for the best historical paper on the African American experience, in honor of Kneeland-Jones and her colleagues. In 2006 the Memphis State Eight were invited back to Memphis State to see the prize awarded at a conference on African American history and be

honored for their pioneering roles in desegregation.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 27, 2010, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Travel agent, elementary school teacher, and public relations manager Marvis Kneeland Jones (1941 -) helped to desegregate Memphis University and worked to promote civil rights and education throughout Memphis.

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:

Kneeland-Jones, Marvis, 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Kneeland-Jones, Marvis, 1941- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Marvis Kneeland Jones, July 27, 2010. 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 Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_001, TRT: 0:32:01 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones was born on February 1, 1941 in Chicago, Illinois to Gladys Robinson Kneeland and James Kneeland. Her paternal family descended from a woman called Mandi, who was trafficked to America on a slave ship and sold to the Williams plantation in Tennessee. Many years later, Kneeland Jones'

paternal grandparents, Melissa Williams Kneeland and Willis Kneeland, were cotton farmers in Tennessee. There, Jones' maternal grandmother, Nina Robinson, was the granddaughter of white slaveholder Paul Barret; and her maternal grandfather, Principal Samuel Robinson, Sr., was a graduate of Rust College. Jones' mother attended LeMoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee, and then taught at the local Barret's Chapel School. After becoming pregnant with Kneeland Jones, she moved temporarily to Chicago to give birth. At the time, Jones' father worked for the Rhodes Jennings Furniture Company in Memphis. At eight years old, Jones suffered a car accident that left her in a coma, and resulted in her mother's death.

Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_002, TRT: 0:30:38 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones' parents, Gladys Robinson Kneeland and James Kneeland, lived in a middle class black neighborhood of South Memphis, Tennessee. There, Kneeland Jones attended Hamilton Elementary School, studied piano and visited the annual Mid-South Fair. When she was eight years old, her mother died in an automobile accident. At that time, she was sent to live with her maternal aunt and uncle, Sarah Robinson and Omar Robinson, Sr., in the all-black Douglass community in North Memphis. During the tenth grade, Kneeland Jones returned to her father's home in South Memphis, where she enrolled at Hamilton High School. There, she became acquainted with civil rights activist Jesse H. Turner, Sr., who offered her a position at the local NAACP branch. She accepted, and went on to participate in sit-in protests with the NAACP Youth Council. Under Turner's influence, Kneeland Jones became one of the eight African American students who desegregated Memphis State University in 1959.

Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_003, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, where she attended Douglass Elementary School and Hamilton High School. While there, she worked for civil rights leader Jesse H. Turner, Sr. at the Memphis branch of the NAACP. Under his direction, Kneeland Jones participated in civil rights activities throughout Memphis, including a boycott of the city buses and sit-ins at lunch counters like Shainberg's Black and White Store. Kneeland Jones excelled as a student; and, as a result, was recommended by Turner to join the NAACP's Memphis State Eight, who desegregated Memphis State University in 1959. The students were initially denied admission, and Kneeland Jones attended Memphis' historically black LeMoyne College during the fall of 1958. That winter, the NAACP won the students' right to enroll at Memphis State University. There, Kneeland Jones and her African American peers faced discrimination from the white students and administrators, who restricted their access to campus facilities.

Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_004, TRT: 0:29:28 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones was one of the Memphis State Eight, who desegregated Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee in 1959. While on the campus, Kneeland Jones and her peers faced discrimination from Dean R.M. Robison and their white peers, who verbally abused them and performed other acts of harassment, such as putting sugar in the gas tank of one black student's car. Although the Memphis State Eight were supported by the NAACP, many dropped out or transferred to other schools before graduation, including Kneeland Jones, who left after two years. During this time, she met Rufus E.

Jones, Sr., who became a prominent entrepreneur and politician in Memphis. They married in 1962, and had three children. Kneeland Jones remained active in the civil rights protests in Memphis, and was en route to the Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike when she learned of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968. That year, she returned to Memphis State University to complete her bachelor's degree.

Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_005, TRT: 0:32:49 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones graduated with a bachelor's degree from Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee in 1974. She experienced hiring discrimination due to her civil rights activity, but eventually joined the faculty of Wells Station Elementary School in Memphis. She returned to school to obtain a master's degree in administration and supervision from Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, Tennessee; and then taught at Memphis' Lester Middle School and A. Maceo Walker Middle School until her retirement in 1999. Kneeland Jones also worked on her husband's legislative campaigns and the mayoral campaign of W.W. Herenton. She talks about her children's education and careers, as well as her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She also reflects upon the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the need for education reform in the United States and her life and legacy. Kneeland Jones concludes this part of the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Marvis Kneeland Jones, Section A2010_086_001_006, TRT: 0:32:26 ?

Marvis Kneeland Jones narrates her photographs.