

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Brenda Gaines

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gaines, Brenda, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Brenda Gaines,
Dates:	January 24, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:42:23).
Abstract:	Corporate chief executive Brenda Gaines (1949 -) was the former deputy chief of staff of the City of Chicago and is currently head of Diners Club North America. Gaines was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_020
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate chief executive Brenda J. Gaines, president of Diners Club North America, grew up in North Chicago, Illinois. She received her B.A. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree in public administration from Roosevelt University.

From 1980 until 1981, Gaines served as a deputy regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development before becoming special assistant to the regional administrator. In September 1983, she was appointed to head the Chicago Housing Authority. In July 1985, Chicago Mayor Harold Washington appointed Gaines deputy chief of staff. After Washington died unexpectedly in 1987, Gaines entered corporate America as the head of government and community relations for Citibank. Gaines quickly rose to senior vice president in charge of residential lending. In 1992, she moved to the Citigroup subsidiary Diners Club and held a number of leadership positions with Diners Club and Citicorp before being named president of Diners Club North America in 1999.

Gaines holds leadership positions with various organizations and businesses. She serves on the boards of Citibank Canada; Diners Club International; Office Depot; World Business Chicago; the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation; the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boys and Girls Club of Chicago; Junior Achievement of Chicago; World Business of Chicago; and the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. She is also a member of Lambda Alpha International and the Economic Club of Chicago, and she mentors for MENTTIUM 100 and the Partnering for Success Program.

Gaines has received a number of awards and honors for her civic and professional leadership and service. *Black Enterprise* included her in its list of the Top Fifty Blacks in Corporate America, and Gaines was named one of the 50 Most Powerful Black Executives in America by *Fortune* in 2002. In 2008 she was appointed to Fannie Mae's Board.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Brenda Gaines was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 24, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate chief executive Brenda Gaines (1949 -) was the former deputy chief of staff of the City of Chicago and is currently head of Diners Club North America.

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:

Gaines, Brenda, 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Gaines, Brenda, 1949---Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Women in the civil service--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Diners' Club.

Occupations:

Corporate Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Brenda Gaines, January 24, 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).

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 Brenda Gaines, Section A2003_020_001_001, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Brenda Gaines describes her family background and childhood. Gaines was born on July 22, 1949 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her mother, DeLoise Spriggs Gaines, was born on March 15, 1929 in Cleveland, Tennessee and moved to North Chicago, Illinois when she was about fifteen. Her maternal grandfather was named after his father, Anderson Spriggs, who had changed his slave name of Murphy to Spriggs. Her father, Clarence Gaines, was born on August 16, 1926 in North Chicago, Illinois and worked at the United Steel Mill in Waukegan, Illinois until it closed in the early 1970s and served as an alderman. Growing up in North Chicago, Gaines remembers the friendly community, the lake, steel mills, oak trees, the food her family cooked, and attending church. Gaines enjoyed visiting the south to see her cousin, although she noticed the strict segregation. Gaines talks about the music she enjoyed as a teenager. Gaines recalls several incidents of prejudiced teachers who had low expectations for her school performance.

African American executives--Interviews.

Women in the civil service--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Brenda Gaines, Section A2003_020_001_002, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Brenda Gaines talks about her education and early career. At North Chicago High School, Gaines participated in a speech club called "Mask and Gavel," high school plays, and an African American social club. Despite the discouragement of her guidance counselor, Gaines attended the University of Illinois in Champaign Urbana where she double-majored in sociology and psychology, pledged the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and encouraged the university to expand its diversity efforts. Gaines recalls learning of the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while traveling in Georgia and comments on the persistence of racism today. After graduating with her B.A. degree in 1970, Gaines worked for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Waukegan, Illinois for thirteen years. She earned her M.A. degree in public administration from Roosevelt University in 1976. In 1983, she was appointed to head the Chicago Housing Authority under Harold Washington after being recruited by HM James Lowry.

Video Oral History Interview with Brenda Gaines, Section A2003_020_001_003, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Brenda Gaines talks about her career. In September 1983, she was appointed to head the Chicago Housing Authority. In July 1985, Chicago Mayor Harold Washington appointed Gaines deputy chief of staff where she worked on the O'Hare Airport renovation. Gaines describes Washington as charming, fair, and constantly working. While providing opportunities to minorities and ensuring that all neighborhoods received city services, Washington made decisions based on need. After Washington died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1987, Gaines entered Corporate America as the head of government and community relations for Citibank. Gaines quickly rose to senior vice president in charge of residential lending. She then held a number of leadership positions with Diners Club and Citicorp before being named president of Diners Club North America in 1999. Gaines comments on the difference between working in the private sector versus government and the need to increase diversity in Corporate America.

Video Oral History Interview with Brenda Gaines, Section A2003_020_001_004, TRT: 0:11:26 ?

Brenda Gaines comments on the lack of diversity in corporate America and her support of affirmative action. While she cannot separate how people treat her based on gender or race, she faces challenges in workplaces that are still dominated by white males. Gaines shares her concerns about the lack of jobs and housing for the black community. Gaines sees her legacy as encouraging young people, particularly young women and people of color in the workplace. Gaines

has a close relationship with her parents who are thrilled by her success. Gaines wants to be remembered for the love, comfort, friendship and support that she provided to her friends and family.