

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorothy R. Leavell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Leavell, Dorothy, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell,
Dates:	April 1, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:02:43).
Abstract:	Newspaper publishing chief executive and Dorothy R. Leavell (1944 -) is the chair of Amalgamated Publishing and the co-founder of "Heroes in the Hood." Leavell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 1, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_061
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dorothy Leavell was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas on October 23, 1944. Leavell was the valedictorian of her Merrill High School class of 1962 and after relocating to Chicago, Leavell attended Roosevelt University.

Leavell's first husband, Balm L. Leavell, Jr., founded the *Crusader* newspaper in Chicago in 1940 and twenty years later, began publishing a similar newspaper in Gary, Indiana. From the time of her husband's death in 1968, Leavell has served the the *Crusader* as publisher and editor while rehabilitating its facilities and modernizing the production process.

Leavell was elected president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) in June of 1995 for a two-year term and was re-elected in June 1997 ending her term in 1999. During her tenure, she increased the visibility and international stature of the organization. In June of 2006, Leavell was elected Chairman of the National Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation.

A member of the NNPA for more than forty-two years, Mrs. Leavell has served in various other capacities including assistant secretary, a member of the board of directors, and as treasurer, a post she held as for ten years.

Leavell has often been honored and recognized for her philanthropic and civic contributions. A recipient of many awards, she was honored as NNPA's Publisher of the Year (1989); the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago; State of Indiana's "Attorney General for a Day; (June 9, 2000); Winnie Mandela Endurance with Dignity Award; Nation of Islam Distinguished Service Award; Operation PUSH Family Affair Award; by the National Association of Black Media Women; the Fourth District Community Improvement Association Award in Gary; Dollars & Sense Magazine Award for Excellence in Business; the Mary McLeod Bethune Award; the Humanitarian Award from the Council on African Affairs; the Publishing Award from the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club and as the Grand Ye Ye at the 24th Annual 2013 African Festival of the Arts Chicago, Africa International House, Inc., among many others.

Active in her faith and church, Holy Name of Mary Church in Chicago's Morgan Park community, Leavell is the wife of John Smith, her second husband, and the mother of two children and three grandchildren. She also raised a niece and nephew.

Dorothy Leavell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 1, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorothy R. Leavell was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 1, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper publishing chief executive and Dorothy R. Leavell (1944 -) is the chair of Amalgamated Publishing and the co-founder of "Heroes in the Hood."

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:

Leavell, Dorothy, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Leavell, Dorothy, 1944---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Dorothy R. Leavell, April 1, 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 Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Dorothy Leavell describes her family background. Her father, Blaine Gonder,

was born in 1895 to Thomas Gonder in Alabama. He later relocated with his family to Monticello, Arkansas, and then moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas to work as a laborer for the Cotton Belt Railroad. Gonder later met Sallie Topps, whom he married in 1917. Sallie Topps was born in 1902 in North Carolina to Andrew Topps and his wife. The Topps family later moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas where Andrew Topps owned a grocery store and his wife worked as a seamstress. Blaine Gonder and Sallie Topps courted under the watchful eye of Topps' parents, as Topps was fifteen when she married. The couple gave birth to Dorothy Leavell late in their lives on October 23, 1944. As a girl, Leavell enjoyed playing outside and eating ripe tomatoes with salt and pepper from her family's garden. Pine Bluff, Arkansas boasted several schools, including Merrill High School, which Leavell attended. Here, Leavell's teachers were extremely dedicated.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_002, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

In 1957, Dorothy Leavell enrolled at Merrill High School in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where her instructors promoted a rigorous curriculum. Leavell was influenced by the school principal, Mr. Jordan, who was firm yet compassionate. On one occasion, Mr. Jordan caught Leavell skipping class, but did not punish her. Leavell watched the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1957, Leavell and her friends were pushed off of a sidewalk by a group of white students. This resulted in an altercation and Leavell's arrest. During Leavell's senior class trip to Winthrop Rockefeller's farm, Rockefeller allowed the group to dine in his boat house after their picnic was rained out. After this, Leavell had favorable views of the Rockefeller Family. In 1962, Leavell applied to the University of Chicago, and took the ACT in an integrated school where she found herself harassed. Her interviewer also refused to recommend her for admission to the University of Chicago because she was African American.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Dorothy Leavell talked about the Masonic Temple in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and her father's job with the Cotton Belt Railroad. Leavell spent the summer of 1961 in Chicago, and was hired by Balm Leavell, founder of the "Chicago Crusader," to work as a bookkeeper for the newspaper. She returned to Pine Bluff, Arkansas to complete high school, and moved to Chicago upon graduating in 1962. Leavell worked full-time at the "Chicago Crusader," and attended Roosevelt University. She also became romantically involved Balm Leavell, and the couple married and started a family. According to Leavell, the "Chicago Crusader" started as a newsletter for the Negro Labor Relations League, a men's group dedicated to improving labor opportunities for Chicago's black community. The League was controlled by Chicago's Democratic Machine, and controlled the numbers game in some parts of Chicago. The "Chicago Crusader" was liberal, particularly in their support of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

In 1968, Balm Leavell, Jr., passed away, leaving behind two newspapers and two children for Dorothy Leavell to care for. Leavell had no publishing experience, and her efforts to take over the "Chicago Crusader" were challenged by Balm Leavell's children from a previous marriage. Nevertheless, Leavell took the helm of the "Chicago Crusader" in 1968, and led the paper to cover controversial issues like the murders of Black Panther Party members Fred

Hampton and Mark Clark, and Ralph Metcalfe's break with Chicago's Democratic Machine. The "Crusader" also called for Edward Harahan's removal from office following the murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, and supported Mayor Harold Washington's mayoral campaign when papers like the "Chicago Defender" were hesitant to. In 1995, Leavell was elected as president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, and was challenged because of her gender. Leavell also talked about Balm Leavell's contributions to the Exposition of the Negro in Business and Culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_005, TRT: 0:31:17 ?

In 1995, Dorothy Leavell was elected as president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. The NNPA faced scrutiny when they honored HistoryMaker Minister Louis Farrakhan as their "Newsmaker of the Year" for spearheading the Million Man March in 1995. The organization also sparked major controversy for visiting Nigeria in light of the country's political issues, and their negative portrayal in the mainstream U.S. press. Some accused Leavell and the NNPA of being bribed to promote a favorable portrayal of Nigeria in the press. Leavell described the challenges the Black Press faces covering international news, including lack of resources. However, Leavell also argued that it is important for the Black Press to promote international news to ensure that international coverage in mainstream media is not unfairly biased. Leavell also talked about former staff members and supporters of the "Chicago Crusader," as well as her concern for the Black Press.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_006, TRT: 0:31:24 ?

Dorothy Leavell shared her hopes and concerns for the black community. Leavell charges the black community to come together and pool its resources together to uplift the community and educate the youth. Leavell's most significant accomplishment as publisher of the "Chicago Crusader" is never missing an issue. Leavell hopes to leave behind a legacy of solving advertising and circulation issues as they relate to black newspapers. She would also like to be remembered as a caring person who loved the Black Press. She closes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy R. Leavell, Section A2003_061_001_007, TRT: 0:03:31 ?

Dorothy Leavell narrates her photographs.