

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ora Higgins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Higgins, Ora, 1910-2012
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ora Higgins,
Dates:	August 29, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:42:30).
Abstract:	Civic leader Ora Higgins (1910 - 2012) is the first African American woman to engineer a corporate integration plan as a personnel manager. Higgins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 29, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_211
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader Ora Higgins was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1910. After moving to Chicago to earn her B.A. degree in personnel administration and her M.A. degree in business law from Northwestern University, Higgins set out on a career that would open doors for countless African Americans.

Higgins went to work for Spiegel, one of the largest mail order retail businesses in the world, after earning her degrees. In 1945, Spiegel began a comprehensive integration of its facilities, and Higgins was placed in charge of the program. In this position, Higgins became the first African American woman to engineer a major industrial integration program. Higgins began her work by initiating an education program for executives and supervisors, helping to break down stereotypes and assuage any fears they might have. From there, she began to manage the personnel, numbering in the hundreds, covering hiring, training, and any problems employees might experience. Spiegel's integration program was complete in every way, paying the same wages to all employees, regardless of race, utilizing the same facilities; she would remain with the company for thirty-one years. In 1950, Higgins was brought in to consult and engineer an integration program for various department stores in the Chicago Loop, the financial and business center of the city. During President Lyndon Johnson's administration, Higgins spoke before the United States Department of Labor on race, poverty, and the need for peace.

In addition to her years of service to Spiegel and her work with integration programs, Higgins was active on a number of organizations and committees. Higgins was a member of the Women's Division of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; the National Chairman of Women in Industry; and a member of the Executive Board of the Metropolitan YWCA. Higgins was also a member of the faculty of Dunbar Vocational Evening School. Clark Atlanta University named a scholarship on Higgins's behalf, and the state of Illinois declared October 27, 2002, Ora Higgins's Youth Foundation Day. In September of 2009, Ora Higgins was honored upon the occasion of her ninety-ninth birthday; at that time she counted a daughter, eighteen grandchildren, and one great-grandchild, among her descendants.

Ora Higgins was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 29, 2003.

Ora Higgins passed away on July 25, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ora Higgins was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 29, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civic leader Ora Higgins (1910 - 2012) is the first African American woman to engineer a corporate integration plan as a personnel manager.

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:

Higgins, Ora, 1910-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Higgins, Ora, 1910-2012--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Business consultants--Interviews

Chicago (Ill.)--Social conditions--20th Century

Childhood

African American youth

Chicago Teachers College

Crane Junior College (Chicago, Ill.)

Chicago Urban League

Segregation--Illinois--Chicago

Discrimination in employment.

Minorities--Employment--United States.

Diversity in the workplace--United States.

African American students

Youth workers--Interviews

African American families

African Americans--Social life and customs

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Corporate Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Ora Higgins, August 29, 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 Ora Higgins, Section A2003_211_001_001, TRT: 0:30:32 ?
African American businessperson and foundation director Ora Higgins recalls her childhood and youth on the South Side of Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s.
African American civil rights workers--Interviews.
African American businesspeople--Interviews.
Business consultants--Interviews.
Chicago (Ill.)--Social conditions--20th Century.
Children.
African American youth.
Chicago Teachers College.
Crane Junior College (Chicago, Ill.).
Chicago Urban League.
Segregation--Illinois--Chicago.
Discrimination in employment.

Minorities--Employment--United States.

Diversity in the workplace--United States.

African American students.

Youth workers--Interviews.

African American families.

African Americans--Social life and customs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ora Higgins, Section A2003_211_001_002, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Businesswoman and foundation director Ora Higgins talks about her education at Chicago Teachers College and Crane Junior College during the late 1920s. She tells about her volunteer work with the Chicago Urban League who were reaching out to white business owners in an effort to encourage them to integrate their staffs. This work, Higgins explains, led to a job at Spiegel, Inc., planning the integration of their workforce. Higgins became the national integration director for Spiegel and served as an integration consultant for other businesses.

Video Oral History Interview with Ora Higgins, Section A2003_211_001_003, TRT: 0:30:47 ?

Businesswoman and foundation director talks about race relations at Spiegel, Inc., where she worked for twenty-six years directing the racial integration of the company and recruiting African American students for executive positions. Higgins also discusses the Ora Higgins Youth Foundation and shares her hopes and concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Ora Higgins, Section A2003_211_001_004, TRT: 0:11:04 ?

Ora Higgins shares photographs of her family and career and the work of the Ora Higgins Youth Foundation.