

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Helen Marshall

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Marshall, Helen M.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Helen Marshall,
Dates:	June 8, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	2 Betacame SP videocassettes (0:59:22).
Abstract:	Borough president The Honorable Helen Marshall (1929 - 2017) was the first African American president of the borough of Queens, New York. Marshall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 8, 2005, in Kew Gardens, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_131
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

New York City's Queens Borough chief executive Helen Marie Marshall was born on September 30, 1929, on Manhattan Island in New York City. Marshall was a product of the New York Public School system; after earning her high school diploma, she went on to graduate with her B.A. degree in education from Queens College. Marshall later took graduate level courses in education and public administration at Bank Street College and Long Island University.

Marshall began her professional career as an early childhood educator; she decided to leave the teaching profession in 1969 to help found and become the first director of the Langston Hughes Library in New York City. Marshall held this position for five years, simultaneously acting as director of the Elmcot Testing and Placement Program. In 1974, Marshall became involved in politics when she ran for and was elected to the position of Democratic District leader in New York City. One year later, Marshall became a Democratic National Committeewoman, and in 1982, was elected to the first of five terms she would serve in the New York State Assembly. In 1991, Marshall was elected to the New York City Council, where she represented the 21st District. As a city councilwoman, Marshall served as chairwoman of the Higher Education Committee; co-chaired the Council's Black and Latino Caucus; and was a member of the Housing and Buildings, Environmental Protection, and Women's Issues Committees. In November of 2001, Marshall was elected the Queens Borough's first African American president.

During Marshall's political career, she was an advocate for quality health care, senior citizens, and the environment. Marshall worked to provide funding to upgrade every library under her jurisdiction, and helped open two new senior centers in her district. LaGuardia Community College honored Marshall with the school's annual Crystal Globe Award for Excellence and Leadership in education.

Marshall and her husband, Donald Marshall, raised two children: Donald, Jr. and Agnes Marie.

Marshall passed away on March 4, 2017 at the age of 87.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Helen Marshall was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 8, 2005, in Kew Gardens, New York, and was recorded on 2 Betacame SP videocassettes. Borough president The Honorable Helen Marshall (1929 - 2017) was the first African American president of the borough of Queens, New York.

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:

Marshall, Helen M.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Marshall, Helen M.--Interviews

African American politicians--Interviews

African American women civic leaders--Interviews

Neighborhood leaders--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Queens (New York, N.Y.)

Occupations:

Borough President

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable Helen Marshall, June 8, 2005. 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 The Honorable Helen Marshall, Section A2005_131_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:33 ?

The Honorable Helen M. Marshall was born on September 30, 1929 in New York City. Her birth mother, Audrey McKenzie Sargent, was born in the early 1900s in Georgetown, British Guyana, and passed away from tuberculosis when Marshall was three years old. Marshall's stepmother, Artemesor Hasty Sargent, grew up in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and became a dressmaker after attending Parsons School of Design in New York City. She helped to organize the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and, as a child, Marshall sometimes attended peaceful union demonstrations. Marshall describes sweatshop working conditions, specifically the conditions in which her stepmother worked during the 1920s and 1930s whereby her stepmother contracted asthma. Marshall's father, Jerald Sargent, was born in 1898 in Georgetown, British Guyana. His father was a typesetter for The New York Times. A merchant seaman, he was affiliated with Garveyism and met Marshall's stepmother soon after her birth mother's death in 1932.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Helen Marshall, Section A2005_131_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:49 ?

The Honorable Helen Marshall describes her family background, including her father's employment with the Works Progress Administration (WPA). According to Marshall, the WPA provided her father with a skill, painting, that he could sell. The Caribbean origins of Marshall's family did not exclude them from slavery, particularly since Guyana was formerly under British rule; this, she says, influenced her father's Garveyite identity. In the 1930s, Marshall's family moved from Harlem to the Bronx where they lived amongst many European immigrant families. Marshall recalls the sights, sounds, and smells of the New York neighborhoods in which she grew up, including visits to Abyssinian Baptist Church, Countee Cullen Library, Morningside Park, the Bronx Zoo, and the Park Avenue market. As a young girl, Marshall assumed responsibility for herself and her younger sister, in part due to her birth mother's death and stepmother's abrupt departure from the family, all while attending P.S. 042 Claremont in the Bronx.