

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with J. Veronica Biggins

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Biggins, J. Veronica, 1946-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 14, 2006 and June 19, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:47:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Corporate executive and presidential appointee J. Veronica Biggins (1946 - ) worked for Bank of America and was one of the highest-ranking women in banking when she left the industry. She also served as Director of Presidential Personnel for President Bill Clinton. Biggins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 14, 2006 and June 19, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_016
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive and presidential appointee J. Veronica Biggins was born on October 19, 1946 in Belmont, North Carolina to Jacqueline McDonald and university professor Andrew Williams. Her father, also a tennis professional, and a family friend funded several of the early tennis ventures of tennis legend, Arthur Ashe. Biggins and her two brothers attended Catholic schools during their formative years. They also spent two years of elementary school in Indonesia. Biggins went on to receive her B.S. degree from Spelman College and her M.A. degree from Georgia State University.

Biggins entered the business world as a management trainee at NationsBank, formerly The Citizens Southern Bank and now Bank of America. She received several promotions and was one of the highest-ranking females in banking in the country when she left the industry as Executive Vice President for Corporate Community Relations. In 1994, Biggins became Assistant to the President of the United States and Director of Presidential Personnel under William Jefferson Clinton. Her responsibilities included the placement of agency heads, ambassadors and members of the presidential boards and commissions. During the fourth world conference on women of the United Nations in 1995, Biggins served as Vice Chairman of the United States Delegation in Beijing, China. She later served as a Senior Partner at Heidrick & Struggles, an international executive consulting firm, and then as Managing Partner of Diversified Search in Atlanta, Georgia.

Biggins has served on the boards of AirTran Airways, Southwest Airlines, Avnet, NDC Health, the Georgia Research Alliance, the Woodruff Arts Center, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Downtown Atlanta Rotary and the International Aids Fund. She was also a fellow of Harvard University's Advanced Leadership Initiative, and has served as Chairman of the Czech Slovak American Enterprise Fund and the Savannah College of Art and Design's Global Board of Visitors. Biggins received a Points of Light award from President George Walker Bush and has been named to the Georgia State University Business Hall of Fame.

J. Veronica Biggins was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 14, 2006 and June 19, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with J. Veronica Biggins was conducted by Evelyn Pounds and Julieanna L. Richardson on February 14, 2006 and June 19, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Corporate executive and presidential appointee J. Veronica Biggins (1946 - ) worked for Bank of America and was one of the highest-ranking women in banking when she left the industry. She also served as Director of Presidential Personnel for President Bill Clinton.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Biggins, J. Veronica, 1946-

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Biggins, J. Veronica, 1946- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Executive Office of the President.

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Heidrick & Struggles

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## Occupations:

Presidential Appointee

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Corporate Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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## 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 J. Veronica Biggins, February 14, 2006 and June 19, 2006. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

J. Veronica Biggins was born on October 19, 1946 in Belmont, North Carolina to Jacqueline McDonald Williams and Andrew Williams. Her maternal great-great-grandparents were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in Gordon, Georgia. Her great-grandfather was brought from Charleston, South Carolina to Belmont, where he was reared at Belmont Abbey. After marrying Biggins' great-grandmother, he moved to Mecklenburg County, North Carolina and worked as a brick mason. Biggins' mother was born in Belmont, where she attended segregated schools, and was raised Catholic. She married Biggins' father in 1943. Biggins' paternal grandmother worked as a domestic for a mill family in Gastonia, North Carolina, while her grandfather worked as a janitor. A graduate of Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, her father served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, then taught engineering at his alma mater, patented medical devices, solved mechanical issues for Burlington Mills Corporation and played tennis.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

J. Veronica Biggins' maternal great-grandfather was a brick mason in Belmont, North Carolina, where he built many cotton mills, high schools and houses, and taught trades in Gastonia, North Carolina. Biggins' paternal grandmother was born in 1898 in South Carolina and grew up in Gaston County, North Carolina, where she worked as a domestic and laundress. A native of York, South Carolina, Biggins' grandfather was a janitor at a cotton mill and raised hunting dogs. They both attended Pentecostal church, where Biggins' grandmother joined the Order of the Eastern Star. Her grandparents also fried fish to sell at Negro League baseball games. In Greensboro, North Carolina, Biggins was the only girl in her Julian Street community, and spent her time on campus at the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina. She attended Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, a Catholic school in Greensboro, and later an international school in Indonesia. Biggins describes the home her father built for his parents.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

J. Veronica Biggins attended Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal School, an all-black, Catholic school in Greensboro, North Carolina, and she aspired to be a nun. Growing up, she visited the library on Bennett College's campus. In the early 1950s, her family moved to Jakarta, Indonesia, where she attended an international school for fifth and sixth grade. There, Biggins expanded her knowledge of world history and culture. Her family traveled extensively, visiting to Thailand, Singapore, Greece, the Holy Land and Italy. After returning to the U.S., she completed junior high school at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal School, then attended Greensboro's Notre Dame High School for two years, before transferring to James B. Dudley High School, a public school. Biggins considers the impact of Catholic schooling on her life outlook. She also describes her childhood personality, her mother and paternal grandmother's

cooking, and her brother's law career, including his representation of a black Greensboro police officer.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

J. Veronica Biggins attended James B. Dudley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina. There, all her teachers were African Americans who held Biggins and her classmates to high standards. During this time, her family, and most of her Julian Street neighbors, moved to the neighborhood of Benbow Park. Biggins took piano lessons, and she participated in cotillion and the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority's Jabba Walk, placing second. Although her family's legacy was at Greensboro's North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, Biggins decided to attend Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. She majored in psychology and minored in sociology, and was able to take classes at nearby universities, including Morehouse College, Morris Brown College and Clark College. She heard Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. speak on campus, and saw him laid to rest in an Atlanta cemetery. She also protested Spelman patron David Rockefeller's visit. Albert Manley was president of Spelman College when Biggins graduated in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_001\_005, TRT: 0:19:10 ?

J. Veronica Biggins took classes alongside Dr. Michael Lomax when they were undergraduates. In 1968, Biggins graduated from Atlanta's Spelman College, then substitute taught before applying to graduate school. After completing her master's degree in psychological counseling at Georgia State University in Atlanta, she worked at Atlanta Technical College. She was among the first black guidance counselors hired in the state's college system. From 1970 to 1974, she and her husband, Franklin Biggins, lived in Washington, D.C., where she worked as a college counselor while he attended Columbus School of Law. Biggins describes the tenor of Washington, D.C. during the Watergate scandal, and outings with her newborn daughter, Dawn Biggins. Upon her husband's graduation, they returned to Atlanta. Despite her restlessness, Biggins stayed at home with her child until Robert James encouraged her to consider a banking career. She joined the management training program at The Citizens and Southern National Bank of Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_002\_006, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

J. Veronica Biggins and Robert James were among the few African Americans who completed The Citizens and Southern National Bank of Georgia (C&S Bank)'s management training program in Atlanta in the mid-1970s. At this time, her daughter, Dawn Biggins, was still an infant, and her husband, Franklin Biggins, worked at the state attorney general's office. Biggins began her twenty-year career at C&S Bank, the largest bank in Georgia, and one of the first U.S. banks to allow women to open their own bank account, as an assistant branch manager in Marietta, Georgia. She was promoted to The Citizens and Southern Corporation in Atlanta, where she worked in branch administration and later directed the human resources department, drawing upon her psychology background. Biggins talks about the banking industry, including the impact of mergers and acquisitions on her career, in the 1980s and 1990s. She also describes her community in southwest Atlanta, and reflects upon her identity as an African American female banker.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_002\_007, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

J. Veronica Biggins was the first female and first African American executive vice president of human resources at The Citizens and Southern Corporation (C&S), a position she took on in the early 1980s. She helped implement controversial non-smoking and maternity leave policies, in addition to an employee assistance program. Biggins also chaired the American Bankers Association's human resource division for two years, and was a member of the National Association of Urban Bankers. As a human resources executive during a period of acquisitions, Biggins was regularly involved in change management procedures. In addition, she established a training program for C&S executives, and directed the bank's foundation processes and public affairs. She describes the organization's commitment to fairness, in terms of both its employees and clientele. She also talks about C&S Bank's disastrous real estate lending practices on Hilton Head Island. C&S was eventually acquired by North Carolina National Bank Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_002\_008, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

J. Veronica Biggins was an executive vice president at The Citizens and Southern Corporation when it was acquired by the North Carolina National Bank Corporation, becoming NationsBank Corporation. Biggins recalls the impact of the NationsBank merger upon her position, as well as how the company gave back to communities. She talks about the role of African Americans in the politics of Atlanta, Georgia, and recalls befriending the Clinton family at Renaissance Weekend on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. In 1994, Biggins was appointed to President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton's administration as director of presidential personnel. Biggins determined appointments for various committees, and nominated physicist Shirley Ann Jackson to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Biggins commuted between Atlanta, where her husband and daughters lived, and Washington, D.C. While working at the White House, she was recruited by Patrick S. Pittard of Heidrick & Struggles International Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_002\_009, TRT: 0:28:59 ?

J. Veronica Biggins was recruited to work for Heidrick & Struggles International Inc., an executive search firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Considering her experience in corporations, and as director of presidential personnel, Biggins eventually accepted a position at the company. Biggins' first search culminated in the recruitment of William H. Gray, III, and she was also responsible for Michael Lomax's appointment as head of the United Negro College Fund. In 1995, Biggins joined the board of NDCHealth, which marked her first corporate board membership. She then joined the boards of Avnet, Inc. and AirTran Airways, for whom she served on the audit, compensation and governance committees. Biggins describes her search process, whereby she matches candidates to executive corporate positions based on their competencies, and the impact of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and the recruitment of people of color and women to corporate boards. Biggins concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life.

Video Oral History Interview with J. Veronica Biggins, Section A2006\_016\_002\_010, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

J. Veronica Biggins was married to her husband, Franklin Biggins, for thirty-five years at the time of the interview. She describes the success of her marriage, and her daughters Dawn Elizabeth Biggins and Kenzie Biggins' personalities, including whom they take after. Biggins reflects upon her career path and life

experiences. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her legacy. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.