

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cole, Brenda H., 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole,
Dates:	January 19, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:37).
Abstract:	State court judge The Honorable Brenda H. Cole (1943 -) is a Georgia State Court Judge, and has held additional appointments as counsel for the West Virginia Department of Corrections in Charleston, West Virginia, Assistant Attorney General in the Tax Division, and as Deputy Attorney General of the West Virginia Environmental and Energy Division. Cole was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 19, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_018
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge Brenda H. Cole was born on January 25, 1943 in Joaquin, Texas to Eulalia and Garfield Hill. She attended Weldon High School, in Gladewater, Texas where her father was the principal, and her mother a teacher. An excellent student, Cole was valedictorian of her graduating class in 1959. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, received her B.A degree in English in 1963, her M.A degree in library science at Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) in 1967 and her J.D degree from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia in 1977.

After her admission to the State Bar of Georgia, Cole began her law career as the Assistant Attorney General in the Fiscal Affairs Division of the Georgia State Law Department, a position she held for five years. After moving to West Virginia, she was employed as counsel for the West Virginia Department of Corrections in Charleston, West Virginia and was admitted to the West Virginia State Bar. Cole served as Assistant Attorney General in the Tax Division of the West Virginia Attorney General’s Office, and as Deputy Attorney General of the West Virginia Environmental and Energy Division.

Returning to Atlanta, Cole rejoined the Georgia State Law Department, serving first as Assistant Attorney General for the Environmental Division; then, Senior Assistant Attorney General, heading the Business and Professional Regulations Division; and later, Deputy Attorney General before her appointment as a State Court Judge in 1998. She retired in 2012 and was appointed as a Senior Judge by Governor Nathan Deal.

Cole has served as President of the Council of State Judges, and as a member of Links, Inc., the Dogwood Chapter and Atlanta’s Women Foundation. She is the founder of the Clark Atlanta University Guild, an organization which provides scholarships for arts and humanities students at Clark Atlanta University. She also serves on the boards of the Children’s Museum of Atlanta and Bar Fitness of Georgia.

Cole is married to Thomas Winston Cole, Jr., President Emeritus, Clark Atlanta University. They are the parents of Kelley S. Cole and Thomas Winston Cole, III.

Cole was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 19, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole was conducted by Denise Gines on January 19, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. State court judge The Honorable Brenda H. Cole (1943 -) is a Georgia State Court Judge, and has held additional appointments as counsel for the West Virginia Department of Corrections in Charleston, West Virginia, Assistant Attorney General in the Tax Division, and as Deputy Attorney General of the West Virginia Environmental and Energy Division.

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:

Cole, Brenda H., 1943-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cole, Brenda H., 1943- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Georgia

Occupations:

State Court Judge

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Brenda H. Cole, January 19, 2007. 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 Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_001,
TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Brenda H. Cole was born on January 25, 1943 in Joaquin, Texas. Her mother, Eulalia Hill Allen, was born on July 2, 1918 in Timpson, Texas to Mary Montgomery and Charles Montgomery, but was raised in Shreveport, Louisiana. Both of Cole's maternal grandparents graduated from Bishop College in Marshall, Texas and became teachers. Cole's maternal great-grandmother was a slave and could recall relatives who passed for white after the end of slavery. Cole's father, Garfield Hill, was born on June 1, 1913 in Garrison, Texas to Frankie Hill and Nib Eli Hill. Cole's paternal grandfather owned a hundred acre farm. Garfield Hill attended Prairie View A&M University in Prairie View Texas and became a principal and ordained minister in Joaquin, Texas. Cole was raised in the small town of Joaquin, Texas near the Louisiana border.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_002,
TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Brenda H. Cole attended Joaquin Colored School in Joaquin, Texas, where her mother was her teacher and her father, the school principal. In elementary school, Cole read constantly and participated in the drill team. While the neighborhood was segregated, Cole remembers going to the movies with the white neighbors who shared her family's back fence. In ninth grade, Cole witnessed the sheriff, Eddie DeFriend, attack an African American man in the middle of church. Because of this incident, Cole's parents decided to move to Gladewater, Texas, where Cole attended Weldon High School. Her teachers at Weldon included her mother, Richard Blick, Margaret Bell, and Mr. and Mrs. Cannon and her extracurricular activities included New Homemakers of America, the square dance team, band, student government, and the Interscholastic League. When Cole was fourteen, she met her future husband, HistoryMaker Thomas W. Cole when they sat next to each other in the clarinet section of the East Texas Teachers Association band.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_003,
TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Brenda H. Cole attended Weldon High School in Gladewater, Texas. She recalls attending a debutante ball where her future husband, HistoryMaker Thomas W. Cole, gave her his class ring. In 1959, Cole graduated from high school and enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, which was an overwhelmingly large city compared to Gladewater. Cole describes the racism of Gladewater, Texas, including when her father was harassed by the police, the segregated stores, and when she was the first African American to work in the drugstore. At Spelman College, Cole became active in student government, the Spelman Glee Club, and the Civil Rights Movement. Cole marched on Rich's Department Store and Grady Memorial Hospital, where she was almost arrested. At Spelman College, Cole also met prominent African Americans like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Baldwin Burroughs, Adam Clayton Powell, Hamilton Holmes, and HistoryMaker Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_004,
TRT: 0:31:07 ?

Brenda H. Cole studied as an exchange student at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs and Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, which were her first experiences in integrated schools. In 1963, Cole graduated and enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin to study library sciences; and, in the spring of 1964, she was a librarian at a school in Corsicana, Texas, where she first heard about the holiday Juneteenth. She and Thomas W. Cole were married on June

14, 1964 and moved to Chicago, Illinois, where Cole worked at Billings Hospital. In 1966, Cole and her husband returned to Atlanta, Georgia, where she enrolled at Atlanta University and completed her M.S.L.S. degree in 1967. She worked as a librarian for five years in the University's Social Science Reading Room and volunteered at the King Center before enrolling at Emory University School of Law in Atlanta, Georgia in 1974. In 1977, she received her J.D. degree and began working in the office of the Georgia Attorney General Arthur Bolton.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_005, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Brenda H. Cole worked for Georgia attorneys general Arthur Bolton, Michael Bowers, and HistoryMaker Thurbert Baker. Between 1977 and 1982, she worked on state tax law in the attorney general's office. Cole remembers living in Atlanta, Georgia during the missing and murdered children case of the 1970s and 1980s. In 1982, Cole and her husband moved to Institute, West Virginia, where her husband was President of West Virginia State College and she was deputy attorney general in the Environmental Division of the West Virginia Law Department. In 1988, Cole returned to Atlanta, Georgia, where she became a deputy attorney general. In 1998, Cole was appointed by Governor Zell Miller as a Georgia State Judge in Fulton County. Cole is active in many community organizations including the Atlanta Community Food Bank; the Dogwood City Chapter of Links, Inc.; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; and the Council of State Court Judges. Cole also talks about her family and lack of regrets, and shares her message for the future.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Brenda H. Cole, Section A2007_018_001_006, TRT: 0:13:50 ?

Brenda H. Cole talks about her family and how she would like to be remembered. She ends the interview by narrating her photographs.