

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook

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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>	Westbrook, Jolette, 1956-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 13, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:29).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Lawyer and state government official The Honorable Jolette Westbrook (1956 - ) served as a director, and later a commissioner, of the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. In addition to her work in public office, Westbrook had a long and successful career as an attorney, which also included working as an instructor for the National Institute for Paralegal Studies. Westbrook was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 13, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_065
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney Jolette Westbrook was born in 1956 in Buffalo, New York; her parents operated a news agency. Westbrook attended Public School #93, Public School #74, and West Hertle Middle School. At St. Joseph's High School, Westbrook's role model was Reverend Joseph Moore; she graduated in 1974 and entered Russell Sage College. There, Westbrook was elected student government president, played in the state volleyball championship, and traveled to England. Graduating with her B.S. degree in criminal science in 1978, Westbrook entered Northeastern University Law School's Cooperative Program and worked as an intern with Greater Boston Legal Services; she earned her J.D. degree in 1981.

Westbrook served as clerk for the Honorable Charles Grabau, associate justice of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1981. In 1982, Westbrook joined the Supreme Judicial Court Bar in Massachusetts and began working for the National Institute for Paralegal Studies as an instructor in the areas of legal research and writing, corporations, and family law. Westbrook joined the firm of Dawkins and Quarles in 1983, where she worked in the area of juvenile law. Westbrook became managing attorney, supervising the appellate work and case loads of attorneys and paralegals for the Southeastern Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (SMLAC). Later, Westbrook joined the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Consumer Affairs as Director of the State's Lemon Law Arbitration Program. After 1991, Westbrook worked with the Department of Public Utilities and became the Director of the Energy Facilities Siting Division of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In April of 2009, Westbrook was appointed Commissioner at the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities by Governor Deval Patrick.

Westbrook was admitted to the United States Supreme Court bar membership in 1996. In 2005, she was appointed

a member of the Massachusetts Judicial Nominating Committee. The recipient of numerous awards, Westbrook was an avid tennis player, and coach of youth basketball and soccer.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 13, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lawyer and state government official The Honorable Jolette Westbrook (1956 - ) served as a director, and later a commissioner, of the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. In addition to her work in public office, Westbrook had a long and successful career as an attorney, which also included working as an instructor for the National Institute for Paralegal Studies.

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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:

Westbrook, Jolette, 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Westbrook, Jolette, 1956- --Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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African American lawyers--Interviews

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African American women civic leaders--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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Massachusetts

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## Occupations:

Lawyer

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State Government Official

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, February 13, 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).

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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 The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section  
A2007\_065\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:59 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook was born on December 10, 1956 in Buffalo, New York to Mary Lue Loveless Westbrook and Quinton Westbrook. Her paternal grandmother, Ella Westbrook, and paternal grandfather were farmers in Ellendale, Tennessee. Her maternal grandfather, Pink Loveless, farmed nearby with her maternal grandmother, Mary Alice King, who had Blackfoot ancestry. Westbrook's parents met and married in Tennessee, and moved to Buffalo, New York, where they raised six daughters, of which Westbrook was the youngest. Her father founded the Westbrook News Agency, and worked as a guard at the Erie County Correctional Facility in Alden, New York. He also took classes at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York. Westbrook's parents emphasized the importance of education, and all of her older sisters, including anesthesiologist Dr. Heloise Westbrook, attended college. On Sundays, Westbrook's family attended New Hope Baptist Church in Buffalo, and often visited Niagara Falls after church services.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American women civic leaders--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section  
A2007\_065\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook attended the integrated P.S. 93, Southside Elementary School in Buffalo, New York, where she excelled in math and reading. She went on to attend P.S. 74, Hamlin Park School, where she acted in plays; took voice lessons; and auditioned for a role with a local black theater company. In the seventh grade, Westbrook took two buses out of her neighborhood to attend the integrated P.S. 94, West Hertel Academy, where she became interested in public speaking, and participated in an oratorical contest. For high school, Westbrook's parents sent her to Mount St. Joseph's Academy, an all-girls Catholic school, where she became interested in photography, and photographed Buffalo Braves' basketball games. During her senior year, her class travelled abroad to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During her childhood, Westbrook was influenced by the calm demeanor and philanthropy of Reverend Joseph Moore at New Hope Baptist Church, where her family belonged to the congregation.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section  
A2007\_065\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook attended the all-women Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, where there only four African Americans in her class. She excelled academically, and was elected to serve as president of the student government. Shortly after, the college announced the closure of its intercultural center. Westbrook organized a sit-in protest, and the center remained open. At Russell Sage College, she majored in criminal science, and was mentored by her

professor, criminal attorney J. Albert Barsamian. In 1978, Westbrook graduated, and enrolled at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts. While there, she interned at the parole board of New York State, and for Greater Boston Legal Services. In 1981, she accepted a position in legal services in Midland, Michigan, despite the recruiter's warning that she would face racial discrimination. When her car was vandalized after a contentious case, Westbrook returned to Boston to work at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section A2007\_065\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook accepted a position at the African American law firm of Dawkins and Quarles in 1983. There, she represented abused children in the juvenile court system, and was influenced by attorney Henry Quarles' commitment to public service. In 1987, she joined the Southeastern Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation, where she tried elder abuse, housing and disability cases. In 1989, she was appointed to direct the Lemon Law Arbitration Program at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation of the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. In 1991, she joined the Massachusetts Energy Facilities Siting Board of the Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Energy as general counsel, and later became its director. There, she determined the environmental impact of major energy companies' proposed facilities. In 2006, Westbrook approved the construction of electric transmission lines for the first offshore wind farm in the United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section A2007\_065\_001\_005, TRT: 0:27:44 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook served on the Judicial Nominating Commission for the State of Massachusetts from 2005 until 2006, and interviewed judicial candidates on behalf of Governor Mitt Romney. Westbrook describes alternative sources of energy that were brought before the Massachusetts Energy Facilities Siting Board during her service, and her optimism regarding the use of renewable energy sources in the future. Westbrook also shares her parenting philosophy, and describes her involvement as a coach for her daughter's, Mary Ann Aaron's soccer team, which allowed her to mentor young women in her community. Westbrook reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community, her family and her life and legacy. She remembers her late husband, consultant James Aaron, and their travels to Malawi, and concludes this part of the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jolette Westbrook, Section A2007\_065\_001\_006, TRT: 0:04:53 ?

The Honorable Jolette Westbrook narrates her photographs.