

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin

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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>	Baldwin, Cynthia, 1945-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 13, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:05:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	State supreme court judge The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin (1945 - ) was the first African American woman to sit on the State Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. She served the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas for sixteen years, and has also taught law in China and several African countries. Baldwin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 13, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_106
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Justice Cynthia Anita Ackron Baldwin was born on February 8, 1945, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. She attended Penn State University, where she received her B.A. degree in English and her M.A. degree in American Literature. After starting her career as an English teacher and assistant dean of student affairs at Penn State's Greater Allegheny Campus, she pursued her J.D. degree at Duquesne University. She then worked in 1983 as the attorney-in-charge in the Office of the Attorney General at the Bureau of Consumer Protection under LeRoy S. Zimmerman.

In 1989, Baldwin was elected to the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas, where she served for sixteen years. Baldwin was a gubernatorial employee to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in 1990 and traveled to Zimbabwe on a Fulbright Scholarship in 1994. She lectured at the University of Zimbabwe in Constitutional Law and Jurisprudence and helped research the constitutional issues that came before the Zimbabwe Supreme Court. In 1995, Baldwin was part of a team sponsored by the American Bar Association, the National Judicial Conference, and the D.C. Superior Court which conducted judicial education programs in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda. She also traveled to mainland China to do judicial seminars with law professors, students and judges.

Baldwin became the first African American woman to sit on the State of Pennsylvania's Supreme Court when she was nominated by Governor Edward Rendell in 2005. Her term began in January, 2006, and she served on the high court for her two-year term, after which she transitioned to the law firm of Duane Morris, LLP. There, her focus is on appellate litigation and education issues. She is an active member of the Penn State Board of Trustees and is a member of many professional organizations including the Pennsylvania Bar Association and the Women's Bar Association. She is also the recipient of several awards, including the 2003 Espirit Children's Service Award from the Mental Health Association of Allegheny County and the 2008 Greater Pittsburgh Area Athena Award for her

success in the judiciary profession and international work.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 13, 2008, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. State supreme court judge The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin (1945 - ) was the first African American woman to sit on the State Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. She served the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas for sixteen years, and has also taught law in China and several African countries.

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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:

Baldwin, Cynthia, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Baldwin, Cynthia, 1945- --Interviews

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African American women judges--Pennsylvania--Interviews

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## African American law teachers--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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Pennsylvania

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### Occupations:

State Supreme Court Judge

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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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 Cynthia Baldwin, August 13, 2008. 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 Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin was born on February 8, 1945 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Her mother, Iona Meriweather, was born in 1914 in Augusta, Georgia. Baldwin's maternal family migrated north by train and smuggled a ticketless, infant Iona in their basket lunch. Her maternal grandfather was employed at National Tube Works steel mill in McKeesport. She visited Augusta, Georgia for the first time at sixteen and describes experiencing overt racism. Baldwin's father, James Alexander Ackron, was born in 1910 in Madisonville, Kentucky. He migrated north to McKeesport with his parents—his mother worked as a seamstress and his father was employed in the mills. He also worked in the steel mills as an adult. Baldwin's parents met at a social in McKeesport; she describes their personalities and her likeness to them. Baldwin was raised on Morgan Street in McKeesport in an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood.

African American women judges--Pennsylvania--Interviews.

African American law teachers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin describes growing up on Morgan Street in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. She describes watching the sunset—exhaust from the nearby steel mills and the added unusual colors. Her parents, Iona Meriweather and James Ackron, were avid readers—her mother was a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Literary Society—and community philanthropists. James Ackron was elected constable of McKeesport, Pennsylvania and became the first African American conductor of the steel mill's diesel train. Baldwin attended Walnut Street Public School in McKeesport. She was denied an opportunity to compete in the kindergarten spelling bee as an African American student. She attended McKeesport High School and graduated in 1962 in a class of 899 students. Her father was a founding member of Calvary United Methodist Church in McKeesport. Her mother, however, attended Zion Baptist and Baldwin went to church service there. Baldwin began speaking in Sunday school and competing in church-community oratorical contests.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin describes her experience at McKeesport High School in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Baldwin was a member of the forensics team and the National Honor Society. She remembers the Civil Rights Movement and Jet magazine's cover story of Emmett Till's murder in 1955. She graduated from McKeesport High School in 1962 and attended Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania. There were relatively few black college graduates in McKeesport by the 1960s. Baldwin describes her first year at Pennsylvania State and her undergraduate student activity in the Civil Rights Movement. She registered black voters in McKeesport in the summer of 1964, the same time as "Freedom Summer" in Mississippi. Baldwin describes other civil rights activity in 1964, including activist Fannie Lou Hamer's appearance at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin talks about meeting her husband as an undergraduate student at Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania. Baldwin describes the events of 1963, including the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the March on Washington. Baldwin received her B.A. degree in English in 1966, and returned to McKeesport, Pennsylvania to teach in Pennsylvania junior high schools. She taught at McKeesport Junior High School and later Frances McClure Junior High School in White Oak, Pennsylvania until 1972. In 1972, Baldwin's daughter was born and she stayed at home for five years and during this time, earned her M.A. degree in American literature from Pennsylvania State University. She also founded a public library in North Versailles, Pennsylvania. Baldwin wrote her M.A. thesis on W.E.B. Du Bois' fiction. In 1977, she enrolled in law school at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and earned her law degree in 1980.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin earned her J.D. degree from Duquesne University in 1980 and began working for the Neighborhood Legal Services Association in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Baldwin worked as a litigator for the organization and litigated family law cases, foreclosures and evictions. She joined the Office of the Attorney General in Pittsburgh in 1982. Baldwin worked there as a litigator for six years, teaching part-time at Duquesne University. Baldwin talks about her decision to run for judge of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in 1987. She won in 1989, and describes her tenure as judge. She travelled to Zimbabwe as a Fulbright Scholar in 1990 and taught at the University of Zimbabwe. In 1995, she travelled to Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania on a team sponsored by the American Bar Association. In 1998, she travelled to China under the Bill Clinton administration's Presidential Rule of Law Initiative.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_006, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin talks about serving on the Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees. Baldwin held several positions beginning in 1995 and was the first black woman Chair of the Board in 2004. In 2005, she was nominated for Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the country's oldest Supreme Court, by Governor Edward Rendell. Baldwin served two years before retiring in 2008. Baldwin describes her tenure in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, including her handling of the Pennsylvania legislature's pay raise. She joined the law firm of Duane Morris LLP as an appellate and trial consultant. Baldwin reflects on her legacy, describes how she would like to be remembered and expresses her concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin, Section A2008\_106\_001\_007, TRT: 0:13:24 ?

The Honorable Cynthia Baldwin narrates her photographs.