

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lovenia Deconge-Watson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	DeConge, Mary Lovenia, 1933-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson,
Dates:	June 9, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:46:19).
Abstract:	Mathematician and math professor Lovenia Deconge-Watson (1933 -) served as Chair and Professor of Mathematics at Southern University from 1986 to 1995, and was a member of the Order of the Sisters of the Holy Family from 1957 to 1976. Deconge-Watson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 9, 2010, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_049
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mary Lovenia DeConge was born on October 3, 1933, in Wickliffe, Louisiana, to Adina Rodney and Alphonse Frank DeConge. Her family was Creole, and she was bilingual speaking both English and French. In 1943, The DeConge family settled in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and six years later, at the age of 16, DeConge was called to the Order of the Sisters of the Holy Family. She took her permanent vows as Sister Mary Sylvester DeConge in 1957.

Two years later, DeConge earned her B.A. degree in mathematics and French from Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania and began to teach high school Mathematics and French at Holy Ghost High School in Opelousas, Louisiana. In 1961, DeConge applied for and received a National Science Foundation Academic Year award to study for a master's degree in Mathematics and French, which she earned from Louisiana State University in 1962. That year, she began teaching math at Delille Junior College, and from 1964 to 1968, she attended St. Louis University and earned her Ph.D. in mathematics with a minor in French. After receiving her degree, DeConge served as assistant professor of Mathematics at Loyola University of New Orleans, and she transferred to Southern University as Associate Professor of Mathematics in 1971. In 1976, DeConge chose to leave her Order of the Sisters of the Holy Family, and in 1982, she was promoted to Professor of Mathematics at Southern University. One year later, DeConge married Roy Watson, Sr., and became Dr. Lovenia DeConge-Watson.

From 1986 to 1995, DeConge-Watson served as Chair and Professor of Mathematics at Southern University, and from 1993 to 2003, DeConge-Watson served as Director of "Modeling Integrated Mathematical Experiences" (MIME), a National Science Foundation Project at Southern University aimed at improving mathematics and science education at all levels. MIME was funded by a \$10,000,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. From 1995 to 1998, DeConge-Watson directed the Center for Minorities in Science, Engineering, and Technology at Southern University and the A&M College System. A recipient of Southern University's Outstanding Chair and Department of the Year Award in 1990 and St. Louis University's Outstanding Graduate of the Graduate School of

Arts and Sciences Award in 1996, DeConge-Watson has served as an interim Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs in 1998, and as interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs in 2003. She retired in 2004.

Lovenia DeConge-Watson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 9th, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson was conducted by Denise Gines on June 9, 2010, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Mathematician and math professor Lovenia Deconge-Watson (1933 -) served as Chair and Professor of Mathematics at Southern University from 1986 to 1995, and was a member of the Order of the Sisters of the Holy Family from 1957 to 1976.

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:

DeConge, Mary Lovenia, 1933-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

DeConge, Mary Lovenia, 1933- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Southern University and A & M College

Occupations:

Mathematician

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Lovenia Deconge-Watson, June 9, 2010. 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 Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_001, TRT: 0:28:59 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson talks about her family background. Her mother, Adena Rodney Deconge was born on August 16, 1987 in Neuros, Louisiana to Regina Dubeau and Joseph Rodney. Deconge-Watson's maternal great-grandmother descended from the Podres family, who were well-known white landowners. Deconge-Watson's father, Alfonse Frank Deconge, was born in Independence, Louisiana to a black mother, Augustine Martin, and a white father. Deconge-Watson grew up in Neuros, Louisiana until age eleven. She describes the first two homes she lived in and the activities she did as a child. Deconge-Watson had five sisters and three brothers, Elnora, Alberta, Alphonse II, Regina, Nolan, Alvin, and Estelle. She attended St. Augustine Catholic School until the fifth grade when her family moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. African American families--Louisiana.

Family history.

Creole dialects, French Louisiana.

Childhood and youth--Louisiana--Neuros.

First day of school.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_002, TRT: 0:26:28 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson talks about her experience at St. Augustine Catholic School, which she attended until the fifth grade. For sixth grade, Deconge-Watson went to Corpus Christi School in New Orleans and became interested in reading there. In seventh and eighth grade, she was at St. Francis Xavier School in Baton Rouge, a poor school where she was one of fifty plus students in a small classroom. For amusement, Deconge-Watson used to dance to a type of music called Zydeco. In 1949, she began ninth grade at St. Mary's academy in New Orleans and also joined the attached convent, to her father's chagrin. The order she joined was called The Sisters of the Holy Family, which was founded in 1842 by Henriette Delille as the second black convent after The Oblate Sisters of the Providence in New York.

Catholic schools--Louisiana.

Zydeco dance.

Monasticism and religious orders for women.

Sisters of the Holy Family (New Orleans, La.)

African American nuns.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_003, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson took her vows to the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1952, after which she taught at a school in Beaux Bridge, Louisiana. She then went to teach sixth grade in Donaldson, Louisiana for two years before going to college in 1955 at Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Deconge-Watson double majored in French and math with minors in English, psychology, and history. Her most influential professor was her math instructor, Sister Deborah. Because Deconge-Watson was only the second black student at Seton Hill, she experienced some racism. Deconge-Watson graduated from Seton Hill in 1959 and went on to teach French and math at Holy Ghost School in Opelousas, Louisiana for two years. In 1961, she went to Louisiana State University to earn her master's degree where she experienced racial discrimination.

Sisters of the Holy Family (New Orleans, La.)

African American teachers—Louisiana.

Seton Hill University.

Discrimination in higher education--United States.

Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, La.). Department of Mathematics.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_004, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson talks about her experience at Louisiana State University. She earned her master's degree in French and math in 1962, but decided to take time off before getting her Ph.D. degree, so she taught at DeLille Junior College in New Orleans from 1963 to 1964. She also started taking classes at Tulane University in the summer of 1964, but transferred to St. Louis University for her Ph.D. degree. Deconge-Watson studied modern geometry and wrote her dissertation on two dimensional lattice theory and metric spaces under Raymond Freeze. After a sixth month illness, Deconge-Watson returned to school, passed her comprehensive exams and received her Ph.D. degree in June of 1968. From 1968 to 1971, she taught at Loyola University in New Orleans and was recruited to teach at Southern University. Deconge-Watson talks about her experience with the campus riots of 1972 where two students were killed.

Degrees, Academic—Louisiana.

Geometry, Modern.

Lattice theory--Study and teaching.

Universities and colleges--Faculty.

Riots Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_005, TRT: 0:30:46 ?

Deconge-Watson explains her decision to leave the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1976. She took a one-year leave from Southern University to work at Rockwell International in Anaheim, California and returned to Southern University as a layperson in 1977. Deconge-Watson became a full professor of mathematics in 1982, and in 1983 she married her former student Roy Watson. In 1986, Deconge-Watson became chair of the mathematics department, and she talks about her involvement in a project to train middle school teachers in Louisiana. In 1995, Deconge-Watson worked on a project to link the campuses of Southern University via fiber optics. She served as an interim vice chancellor for academic affairs before finally leaving Southern in 2004. Deconge-Watson talks about her contribution to teaching an mathematics, and she describes the traveling that she and her husband Roy did for fun.

Lupus.

Rockwell International.

Proposal writing for grants.

Mathematics--Study and teaching (Middle school) —Louisiana.

Southern University System.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_006, TRT: 0:12:35 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson talks about her travels to Africa. She visited Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. She goes on to mention the awards that she has received including three awards from Southern University in 2006 and distinguished alumni awards from both St. Louis University in 1996 and Seton

Hill University in 2009. Deconge-Watson expresses her appreciation for her education at Seton Hill University and her involvement in the Sisters of the Holy Family. She closes the interview by sharing her legacy and giving advice to future generations.

Travel—Africa, West.

Universities and colleges Alumni and alumnae.

Seton Hill University.

Sisters of the Holy Family (New Orleans, La.)

Knowledge and learning.

Video Oral History Interview with Lovenia Deconge-Watson, Section A2010_049_001_007, TRT: 0:08:36 ?

Lovenia Deconge-Watson describes her photographs.

Photographs.

African American families.

Universities and colleges--Faculty.

St. Louis University--Alumni and alumnae.

Alzheimer's disease--Family relationships.