

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Paulette Brown

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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>	Brown, Paulette, 1951-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 29, 2015
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2015
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:41:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Lawyer Paulette Brown (1951 - ) was a partner at Locke Lord LLP, and the first woman of color elected President of the American Bar Association. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 29, 2015, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2015_001
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer Paulette Brown was born on April 28, 1951 in Baltimore, Maryland to Wilbur Brown, a truck driver, and Thelma Brown, a homemaker. She attended Baltimore's P.S. 145 and Calverton Junior High School, graduating from Northwestern High School in 1969. Brown studied sociology at Howard University before changing her major to political science. In 1973, she received her B.S. degree in political science from Howard University, and went on to receive her J.D. degree from Seton Hall University School of Law in 1976.

Brown spent nine years working as in-house counsel at several Fortune 500 companies, including National Steel Corporation, Prudential Insurance Company of America, Inc., and Buck Consultants Inc. Brown was the founding partner of Brown & Childress, and worked as a solo practitioner for sixteen years. In 1983, she was elected president of the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey. In 1993, Brown & Childress merged with another firm to become Brown, Lofton, Childress & Wolfe, New Jersey's largest minority firm at the time. That same year, she was elected president of the National Bar Association, and later served as a municipal court judge in Plainfield, New Jersey. As president of the NBA, Brown led a delegation to monitor the first free and democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, and became a member of the American Bar Association in 1997. Brown joined Duane, Morris & Heckscher LLP as a partner in January 2000, and then she moved to the New Jersey office of Edwards & Angell LLP in 2005. In 2007, she was elected as a member of the American Bar Association's board of governors. She co-chaired the Commission on Civic Education in the Nation's Schools in 2010, and in 2015, became the first woman of color to be elected as president of the American Bar Association.

Brown received numerous awards, including the National Bar Association's highest award, the C. Francis Stradford Award. She also received the Gertrude Rush and Cora T. Walker Legacy Awards from the National Bar Association, the Medal of Honor Award from the New Jersey Bar Foundation, the Spirit of Excellence and Margaret Brent Awards from the American Bar Association, the Award of Excellence from the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, and the Robert L. Carter Legacy Award from the New Jersey chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. She also received the Professional Lawyer of the Year Award from the New Jersey Commission on Professionalism. Brown

was repeatedly selected by U.S. News as one of the “Best Lawyers in America” in the area of commercial litigation. She was named to the Ebony Power 100 List in 2014, and was selected as one of the 50 “Most Influential Minority Lawyers in the U.S.” by the National Law Journal and one of the country’s “Most Influential Black Lawyers” by Savoy Magazine.

Brown has one son, Dijoun Brown.

Paulette Brown was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 28, 2015.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Paulette Brown was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 29, 2015, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Lawyer Paulette Brown (1951 - ) was a partner at Locke Lord LLP, and the first woman of color elected President of the American Bar Association.

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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:

Brown, Paulette, 1951-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Paulette, 1951- --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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## Occupations:

Lawyer

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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 Paulette Brown, July 29, 2015. 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 Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:46 ?

Paulette Brown was born on April 28, 1951 in Baltimore, Maryland to Wilbur Brown and Thelma Stamper Brown. Her paternal grandparents, Ruth Macer and Leewood Macer, were originally from Eastern Shore, Maryland. Brown's maternal grandmother, Pauline Austin Stamper, attended Fayetteville State College in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and worked as a teacher before meeting Brown's maternal grandfather, George Stamper. The couple migrated to Baltimore in the 1920s, where Brown's maternal grandfather began working at a copper plant while her grandmother took care of the home. Brown's parents met in Baltimore, where they raised Brown, her two older sisters, Brenda Brown Forrest and Carlita Brown White, and her older brother, Wilbur Brown. As a young child, Brown enjoyed her father's cooking, visiting the Hersheypark amusement park and listening to jazz singers like Nancy Wilson and Gloria Lynne. She began her education at P.S. 145, Alexander Hamilton Elementary School in Baltimore.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:48 ?

Paulette Brown attended P.S. 145, Alexander Hamilton Elementary School and Calverton Junior High School in Baltimore, Maryland. Under the guidance of supportive teachers, Brown excelled in English and history. She was also active in student government, and enjoyed singing at Wayland Baptist Church in Baltimore each Sunday. Brown attended Baltimore's Northwestern High School, where most of the students were Jewish. Although she expressed interest in Brown University, her guidance counselor discouraged her from applying, so she enrolled at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1969. The atmosphere on campus was politically charged with frequent student protests. Initially, Brown majored in sociology; but with the encouragement of her roommates, she changed her major to political science. During the summer, she worked for the U.S. Government Printing Office and U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. After graduating, she applied to Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark, New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:00 ?

Paulette Brown was heavily involved in student government while attending Howard University in Washington, D.C. Ultimately, she was elected president of her junior class, and often engaged in arguments with U.S. Representative Elijah Cummings, who was senior class president at that time. Brown's classmates also included dancer, actress and television producer Debbie Allen, actress Phylicia Rashad and lawyer Renee Higginbotham-Brooks. During her senior year, she interned at Newark Mayor Kenneth Gibson's Policy and Development Office. While attending Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark, New Jersey, she joined a chapter of the Black American Law Students Association. After graduating in 1976, she was hired in the human resources department at National Steel Corporation, where she worked on issues regarding employee benefits and the Employment Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. After five years, she left the company to work at the Prudential Insurance Company of America for one year.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_004, TRT: 4:34:02 ?

Paulette Brown joined the New York City employee benefits consulting firm, Buck Consultants, in 1979, where she used her expert knowledge of the Employment Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. While she advanced quickly, she sensed the firm would never promote her to director, so she decided to launch her own practice. During that time, she received work from James O. Cole at The Clorox Company and Ford Motor Company. In 1983, Brown became president of the Association of Black Women Lawyers of New Jersey,

an organization she had co-founded with Renee Jones Weeks and Lois Wright while attending Seton Hall University School of Law in Newark, New Jersey. As president, she jointly led a task force to investigate the discriminatory treatment of African American women in the judiciary and the legal profession. Brown was also an active member of the National Bar Association, serving as deputy regional director in 1980, regional director in 1981 and eventually vice president.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:58 ?

Paulette Brown was elected president of the National Bar Association in 1993, where she advocated for the inclusion of more African American judges in the federal judiciary. In partnership with Arnette Hubbard, Brown led a delegation to monitor the first free and democratic elections in South Africa. While working in the Transkei region, Brown was deeply moved by the long lines of prospective voters. Afterwards, she continued to work with the U.S. Department of State and bar associations in various African countries. Brown co-founded the law firm of Brown and Childress, which later became Brown, Lofton, Childress and Wolfe. In 1999, she joined Cheryl Blackwell Bryson at Duane Morris and Heckscher. At this point in the interview, Brown recalls her introduction to the American Bar Association, first through the Young Lawyers Division of the New Jersey State Bar Association. Years later, she joined its litigation section, and headed the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_006, TRT: 6:34:36 ?

Paulette Brown started her private practice, Brown and Childress, in 1983. At the time, work was often difficult to find for African American lawyers, as corporate clients were reluctant to contract minority firms. Eventually, Brown found government work through East Orange Mayor Cardell Cooper, and commercial law work through Dennis Archer's demonstration project, which was designed to give African American lawyers better opportunity in the legal profession. Through this endeavor, Brown met other minority lawyers like Demetrius Carney in Chicago, Illinois and Cora Walker in New York City. Brown left her independent practice in 1999 to join the firm of Duane Morris LLP, where Cheryl Blackwell Bryson was the only other African American female partner. In 2005, Brown went to work for the law office of Edwards and Angell. With Dennis Archer's encouragement, Brown decided to run for president of the American Bar Association in 2015. Once elected, she established three initiatives for her yearlong presidency.

Video Oral History Interview with Paulette Brown, Section A2015\_001\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:11 ?

Paulette Brown adopted her son, Dijuan Brown, from foster care when he was eight years old. After learning about Piney Woods Country Life School, he hacked Brown's email account to contact them about enrolling. As an adult, Brown's son pursued an acting career in Los Angeles, California, and then moved to New York City, where he also worked as a substitute teacher. Brown shares her advice for aspiring African American law professionals; and reflects upon the future of the legal profession. She also talks about the challenges currently facing the African American community, including police brutality and the school-to-prison pipeline. She concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy, and the legacy of her generation as well as the societal contributions of African American women and the African American community as a whole.