

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bonnie St. John

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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>	St. John, Bonnie
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 11, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:29:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civic leader and skier Bonnie St. John (1964 - ) was the first African American to medal at the Winter Paralympics. A world renowned keynote speaker and leadership expert, she also authored seven best-selling books. St. John was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_009
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader and skier Bonnie St. John was born on November 7, 1964 in Detroit, Michigan to Ruby Cremaschi-Schwimmer, an educator, and Lee St. John, an engineer. St. John's leg was amputated at the age of five; and in 1979, St. John began skiing with an amputee club. She graduated from Mission Bay High School in San Diego in 1982, and competed in the 1984 Winter Paralympics, where she won two bronze medals and a silver medal, becoming the second fastest woman in the world on one leg in that year, and the first African American to medal in the Winter Paralympics. St. John earned her A.B. degree in government magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1986, and received a Rhodes scholarship to attend the University of Oxford, where she earned her M.Litt. degree in economics in 1990.

Upon graduation, St. John began her career in sales at IBM. In 1992, she was appointed by President Bill Clinton as a director for human capital issues for the White House National Economic Council. St. John left her position at the White House in 1994, and pursued a career as a writer and motivational speaker. She also founded Blue Circle Leadership, a business consultation agency with clients that include Target, FedEx, Microsoft, Pepsi, and Disney, among others. St. John was asked to speak during the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Paralympics in Salt Lake City, Utah; and in 2010, she represented the United States as a member of President Barack Obama's official delegation to the Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver, Canada.

St. John was selected by *NBC Nightly News* as one of the five most inspiring women in America in 1996. She also made appearances on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, CNN, *Montel*, and the Discovery Health Channel. St. John received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Lasell College in 2004, and President George W. Bush honored St. John for Black History Month at the White House in 2008. She wrote six books, including two Amazon #1 bestsellers – *Live Your Joy*, published in 2009, and *How Great Women Lead*, which was published in 2012 and co-authored with her daughter, Darcy Deane. *How Great Women Lead* featured a compilation of interviews with influential women leaders such as Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

St. John is married to Allen P. Haines, and has one daughter named Darcy Deane.

Bonnie St. John was interviewed by *The History Makers* on August 11, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bonnie St. John was conducted by Harriette Cole on August 11, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic leader and skier Bonnie St. John (1964 - ) was the first African American to medal at the Winter Paralympics. A world renowned keynote speaker and leadership expert, she also authored seven best-selling books.

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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:

St. John, Bonnie

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

St. John, Bonnie--Interviews

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African American skiers--Interviews.

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Skier

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

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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 Bonnie St. John, August 11, 2016. 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 Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_001, TRT: 1:26:46 ?

Bonnie St. John was born on November 7, 1964 in Detroit, Michigan to Ruby Page Schwimmer and Lee St. John. Her maternal family had Gullah ancestry, and eventually settled in Mount Dora, Florida. St. John's mother was born in 1939 in Gainesville, Florida to parents who separated before her birth. She was initially raised by her maternal grandmother in Gainesville, and later moved to her mother's home in New York City, where she was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. As a result, St. John's mother left home at thirteen years old. She met St. John's father, a white man, in New York City's Washington Square Park. Because of her race, St. John was ostracized by most of her father's family, except for her paternal grandmother, Leah Barnhardt St. John, who often visited and sent gifts. St. John's parents married and settled in Detroit, and then divorced while St. John was young. Her mother remarried, and moved with St. John and her two siblings to San Diego, California.

Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:17 ?

Bonnie St. John was born with proximal femoral focal deficiency, which prevented her right leg from growing. After her mother remarried, St. John moved with her family to National City in San Diego County, California at the age of two years old. Four years later, her leg was amputated at the Shriner's Hospital for Crippled Children in Los Angeles, California, where she stayed for six months while adjusting to her prosthetic leg. Between the ages of two and seven years old, St. John was sexually abused by her stepfather, Paul Cremaschi, as was her older sister, April St. John Keenoy. Their mother, Ruby Page Schwimmer, who was also sexually abused as a child, failed to intervene. Later in life, St. John underwent therapy to recover from the trauma of the abuse, for the sake of her newborn daughter, Darcy Deane. St. John's white father, Lee St. John, died when she was twelve years old, and she attended his funeral despite facing racial discrimination from his family members.

Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:21 ?

Bonnie St. John began her education at the Palmer Way School in National City, California, where she rode a bus for disabled children. St. John went on to attend the majority-white Mission Bay High School in San Diego, California. There, she befriended student Barbara Warmath, who took St. John on her first skiing trip during her junior year. St. John decided to pursue ski racing competitively, and finished high school at the Burke Mountain Academy in East Burke, Vermont. During her training for the U.S. Paralympic team, St. John joined the all-black National Brotherhood of Skiers, and experienced setbacks like a broken ankle and high travel costs to attend meets for skiers with disabilities. After graduating, she enrolled on a scholarship at Harvard University, where her sister, April St. John Keenoy, was also a student. St. John majored in government, and took on a heavy course load in order to graduate in three years. She qualified for the 1984 Winter Paralympics, and won the silver and bronze medals.

Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_004, TRT: 4:25:13 ?

Bonnie St. John graduated from Harvard University in 1986, and received a Rhodes Scholarship to study at the University of Oxford in England. There, she befriended her fellow black female Rhodes Scholars Susan Rice, Lisa D. Cook and Terri Sewell; and met her first husband, physicist Grant Deane. In 1990, St. John moved to San Diego, California, where she worked for IBM. She was appointed to the National Economic Council following the election of President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton, and served on the council until 1995. She then returned to San Diego to raise her daughter, Darcy Deane; and founded a business, the Blue Circle Leadership Institute, where she worked as a writer and

motivational speaker. As she struggled to heal from the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, St. John deepened her Christian faith. In 2007, she published her book 'How Strong Women Pray,' which was based upon interviews with twenty-seven female leaders.

Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_005, TRT: 5:25:56 ?

Bonnie St. John founded the Blue Circle Leadership Institute around the time of the birth of her daughter, Darcy Deane. She divorced her husband, physicist Grant Deane, in the early 2000s; and moved to New York City in 2002. St. John homeschooled her daughter during elementary school, and brought her on trips around the country while working as a motivational speaker. During these trips, St. John organized educational outings, such as visiting a cotton field in Mississippi. When St. John's daughter became a teenager, she and St. John partnered to write the book 'How Great Women Lead.' Together, they interviewed leaders like Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Air Force pilot Nicole Malachowski, and U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Around 2007, St. John met her second husband, television producer Allen Haines, with whom she collaborated to write the books 'How Strong Women Pray' and 'Live Your Joy.'

Video Oral History Interview with Bonnie St. John, Section A2016\_009\_001\_006, TRT: 6:11:30 ?

Bonnie St. John moved to New York City in 2002 to facilitate her publishing career, and develop relationships with clients at the Blue Circle Leadership Institute. Soon after, she was recruited by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to take part in the city's unsuccessful bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics. St. John began creating leadership development programs targeted at women after publishing 'How Great Women Lead' with her daughter, Darcy Deane. Upon finding that few women of color attended the sessions, she created an online learning platform to make her programs more accessible. In 2017, St. John and her husband, television producer Allen Haines, published 'Micro-Resilience,' a self-help book about increasing determination while avoiding fear. St. John reflects upon her life and marriage; and talks about her daughter's experiences as a motivational speaker, and interest in the Chinese language. She concludes the interview by describing her plans for the future.