

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Doris Topsy-Elvord

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Topsy-Elvord, Doris
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord,
Dates:	November 22, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:47).
Abstract:	City council member Doris Topsy-Elvord (1931 -) was the first African American woman to be elected to the Long Beach, California city council. Topsy-Elvord was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 22, 2002, in Long Beach, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_212
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Doris Topsy-Elvord was born on June 17, 1931, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1942, her family moved to Long Beach, California, where she has remained most of her life. After graduating from St. Anthony High School in 1949, she initially pursued a degree in chemistry, majoring in the subject at the University of California, Los Angeles. However, she soon realized her life's work would be better spent in the public service sector.

Topsy-Elvord began her career in public service by working as a California Youth Authority counselor, followed by positions in the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the city of Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine. For nineteen years, she worked for the Los Angeles Probation Department as a deputy probation officer. Topsy-Elvord earned her B.A. in social welfare from California State University, Long Beach, in 1969 and her M.A. in criminal justice administration from Chapman College in 1981. She retired in 1988 after thirty-five years of service to her community.

Topsy-Elvord became a member of the city of Long Beach Civil Service Commission and served one term as president. She also served as vice president of the Long Beach Unified School District Personnel Commission and commissioner of the First Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles from November 1987 until November 1989. In 1992, she became the first African American female elected to the Long Beach City Council. Topsy-Elvord holds the honor of being twice unanimously selected as vice mayor of Long Beach, in 1996 and 1998. She is the co-founder of the African American Heritage Society, an organization that raises money for educational materials on African Americans and cultural artifacts.

Topsy-Elvord has served on numerous boards and is a member of various organizations and societies. She has received many honors and awards for her lifetime of service to the Long Beach community, including being named 1994's Woman of the Year by California State Senator Ralph Dills.

Topsy-Elvord is married and has three sons, five granddaughters, one grandson and one great-grandchild.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 22, 2002, in Long Beach, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. City council member Doris Topsy-Elvord (1931 -) was the first African American woman to be elected to the Long Beach, California city council.

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:

Topsy-Elvord, Doris

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Topsy-Elvord, Doris--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Long Beach (Calif.)

Occupations:

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Doris Topsy-Elvord, November 22, 2002. 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 Doris Topsy-Elvord, Section A2002_212_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Doris Topsy-Elvord describes her upbringing. Her mother, Mary Lee Rose, was born in 1913 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. After Rose's mother died, she was sent to live with her aunt in Helena, Arkansas, where she met Clyde Julius Walker at Eliza Miller High School. The couple married after graduating and gave birth to

their only child, Doris, on June 17, 1931 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1940, Rose was hired to work as a live-in nanny for a family on summer holiday in Long Beach, California. She chose to stay in California, yet Clyde Julius Walker refused to join her. Doris Topsy-Elvord was sent to be raised by her great aunt in Helena, Arkansas, but moved to Long Beach after she died in 1942. Topsy-Elvord was a sheltered, yet strong-willed youth, who was heavily influenced by her experiences attending Catholic School. Topsy-Elvord also enjoyed going to the YWCA, watching the antics of the local “spit and argue” club, and provoking the nuns and priests at St. Anthony High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord, Section A2002_212_001_002, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Doris Topsy-Elvord grew up with HistoryMaker John Stroger, Jr. in Helena, Arkansas before moving to Long Beach, California to live with her mother. In 1949, Topsy-Elvord graduated from St. Anthony High School in Long Beach, California. She enrolled at the University of California, Los Angeles, and majored in chemistry, but dropped out in 1952. In the 1950s, Topsy-Elvord was hired to work for the California Youth Authority, a youth prison. Several years later, she began working as a procurement officer for Sybil Brand Women’s Prison. Inspired by her prison work, Topsy-Elvord enrolled at California State University, Long Beach, where she graduated with a B.A. in social welfare in 1969. She was then hired as a deputy probation officer by the Los Angeles Probation Department. Topsy-Elvord went on to receive her M.A. in criminal justice administration from Chapman College in Orange California in 1981. Topsy-Elvord also talks about the prison industry, and Stanley “Tookie” Williams, founder of the Crips gang.

Video Oral History Interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord, Section A2002_212_001_003, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

In the 1960s, Doris Topsy-Elvord was hired as a deputy probation officer with the Los Angeles Probation Department, where she worked with criminals from drug addicts to sex offenders. Though Topsy-Elvord was raised as a Catholic, she began to question Catholic teachings as a high school student. She comments on pedophilia in the Catholic Church, and talks about nuns and priests, including Father George Stallings and HistoryMaker Father George Clements. In 1987, Topsy-Elvord was appointed to the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles by Bishop Carl A. Fisher. She held this appointment until 1991. Topsy-Elvord talks about some of the cultural and historical icons of Long Beach, California, including Long Beach Polytechnic High School, HistoryMakers Ernest McBride, Sr. and Dale Clinton, and activists Mary Dell Butler and Zelma Lipscomb. After retiring from the Los Angeles Probation Department in 1988, Topsy-Elvord was inspired to become involved in politics.

Video Oral History Interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord, Section A2002_212_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

In 1992, Doris Topsy-Elvord ran for a seat on the City of Long Beach City Council. Her ability to engage with various cultural groups gained her supporters, and she won the election by sixteen votes, making her the city’s first African American councilwoman. Topsy-Elvord played a major role in rebranding the City of Long Beach as a tourist attraction following the loss of the city’s military contracts. She was also unanimously selected as the Vice Mayor of the City of Long Beach in 1996, and again in 1998. She ultimately served as a city councilwoman until 2000. Topsy-Elvord served on boards for Long Beach Transit, St. Mary Medical Hospital, Children’s Dental Health

Clinic, and others. The close-knit nature of Long Beach has also allowed Topsy-Elvord to build meaningful relationships with people like Beverly O'Neill, Mayor of Long Beach, and Joe Prevratil, owner of the Queen Mary ocean liner. Topsy-Elvord talks about her hopes and concerns for the African American community and her legacy, as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Doris Topsy-Elvord, Section A2002_212_001_005, TRT: 0:24:31 ?

In 1971, Doris Topsy-Elvord traveled around Europe for six weeks. She visited Spain and Monaco, where she attended a bull fight and visited Prince's Palace of Monaco. She also visited Paris, France, where a group of African students threw a brick through the glass of the Louvre in response to the death of Black Panther George Jackson, while she was visiting the museum. In 1974, Topsy-Elvord went to the Caribbean, and in 1990, she attended the Pan African Asian Conference in Egypt. In 1988, Topsy-Elvord visited Australia, and she talks about Australian Aborigines. One of Topsy-Elvord's most memorable travel experiences was visiting South Africa, where she saw the home of Nelson Mandela, observed the remnants of Apartheid, and embraced the country's contemporary culture. Topsy-Elvord talks about her mother's pride in her accomplishments, as well; Mary Lee Rose passed away in 2000. She closes the interview by talking about how she would like to be remembered, and narrating her photographs.