

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruby Nell Sales

PERSON

Sales, Ruby

Alternative Names: Ruby Nell Sales;

Life Dates: July 8, 1948-

Place of Birth: Jemison, Alabama, USA

Residence: Chevy Chase, Maryland

Occupations: Social Activist; Nonprofit Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Ruby Sales, born in Jemison, Alabama, on July 8, 1948, suffered many hardships during the civil rights movement but was not disparaged. She has spent her adult life working in philanthropic endeavors.

While studying at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, Sales became involved with the state's Freedom Summer voter registration drive. One afternoon, as she and Jonathan Daniels, a white seminarian, stood in line at a corner store, a man shot and killed Daniels for standing behind Sales in line. Unnerved and unable to speak significantly for seven months, Sales determined to attend the trial of Daniels' murderer, Tom Coleman, and to testify on behalf of her slain colleague. Her perseverance moved her to a career of social activism.

After earning her B.A. in American history in 1971 from Manhattanville College, where she was a National Council of Churches Merit Scholar, Sales enrolled in graduate school at Princeton University. Between 1971 and 1976, she was a Danforth Scholar, and she advanced to Ph.D. candidacy in American history before leaving the university. Sales taught adult education in Boston for a year, and then worked as director of the Citizens' Complaint Center in Washington, D.C. From 1986 to 1988, she taught courses on the civil rights movement and African American women's history at the University of Maryland before becoming affiliated with the National Women's Studies Association. She served as director from 1989 to 1991 of Black Women's Voices and Images, an initiative to wed research to action on issues affecting black women. For the following three years she worked as director of Women of All Colors, coordinating a broad coalition of progressive organizations to work on issues affecting all women.

In 1994, Sales entered the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She studied feminist, African American and liberation theologies with an emphasis on race, class and gender issues, and in 1998 received her master's of divinity. Her training as a seminarian prepared her to launch SpiritHouse in 2000, a nonprofit organization focused on community organizing and spiritually based community building. Sales has written several articles and has appeared as a commentator on several television programs. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Related Entries

George Washington Carver High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Tuskegee University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Manhattanville College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

BA

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Episcopal Divinity School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of Maryland, College Park [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to 1992]

Instructor

Citizen Complaint Center [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2011 to ?]

Director

Black Women's Voices and Images [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1989 to 1991]

Director

SpiritHouse Project [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2000 to ?]

Founder