

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Shirley Jean Wilcher

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilcher, Shirley J., 1951-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher,
Dates:	June 29, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:34:52).
Abstract:	Civil rights lawyer Shirley Jean Wilcher (1951 -) was the founder, president and CEO of Wilcher Global, L.L.C. Wilcher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 29, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_154
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Affirmative action specialist Shirley Jean Wilcher was born July 28, 1951, in Erie, Pennsylvania. Raised by her grandmother and her uncle Marcus, Wilcher attended Lane Elementary School and West Junior High School in Akron, Ohio. After moving to Boston, Wilcher attended Patrick T. Campbell Junior High and eventually graduated from Girls Latin High School in 1969. Mt. Holyoke College presented Wilcher with the opportunity to live in Paris, where she was influenced by the work of Franz Fanon. Graduating in 1973 with her B.A. degree in French and philosophy, Wilcher earned her M.A. degree in urban policy and policy analysis from the New School for Social Research in 1976. Wilcher spent 1977 and 1978 with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York and San Francisco during the Allen Bakke Case. Wilcher, who would go on to earn certificates in alternate dispute resolution, diversity training, and labor arbitration, was awarded her J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1979.

A staff attorney for Proskauer Rose Goetz and Mendelsohn in 1979, Wilcher moved on to serve as staff attorney at the National Women's Law Center from 1980 to 1985. From 1985 to 1990, Wilcher served as associate counsel for civil rights for the House Committee on Education and Labor investigating civil rights cases at OEO and various government agencies. Wilcher was director for State Relations and general counsel for the National Association for Independent Colleges and Universities from 1990 to 1994. From 1994 to 2001, Wilcher served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor Employment Standards Administration where she won \$275 million for women, minorities, people with disabilities, and veterans. From 2001 to 2003, Wilcher was executive director of Americans for a Fair Chance, a consortium of six civil rights legal organizations that was formed to serve as an educational resource and advocate for affirmative action; in 2003, the United States Supreme Court upheld affirmative action. In 2001, Wilcher formed Wilcher Global LLC to help organizations reach diversity goals.

A twenty year veteran of legal affirmative action battles, Wilcher received the NAACP Benjamin Hooks Award, the Keeper of the Flame Award, and the American Association for Affirmative Action's Rosa Parks Award in

2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 29, 2005, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Shirley Jean Wilcher (1951 -) was the founder, president and CEO of Wilcher Global, L.L.C.

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:

Wilcher, Shirley J., 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilcher, Shirley J., 1951---Interviews

African American women lawyers--Interviews

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews

African American women civic leaders--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Wilcher Global LLC

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Shirley Jean Wilcher, June 29, 2005. 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 Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_001, TRT: 0:28:54 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher was born on July 28, 1951 in Erie, Pennsylvania to Jeanne Evans Cheatham and James Wilcher. Her mother's ancestors were brought from Africa to South Carolina as slaves, and both sides of her family came from an agricultural background. Wilcher's mother grew up playing piano with her siblings in Akron, Ohio. Wilcher's father was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1921. His family moved to Akron and his father left the family after his insurance company failed in the Great Depression. His brother, Marcus Wilcher, became a realtor who helped African Americans find homes. Wilcher's parents met when they played in a band together. Wilcher was born when they were in Pennsylvania for a show. Her parents never married, and Wilcher was raised in Akron by her strict paternal grandmother, Viola Wilcher. Her Uncle Marcus Wilcher's family also lived in the household until they moved to California when Wilcher was seven. Although she did not grow up with her mother, Wilcher often visited her maternal family.

African American women lawyers--Interviews.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American women civic leaders--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_002, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher attended Samuel A. Lane Elementary School and West Junior High School in Akron, Ohio, where she enjoyed playing violin and drawing. Wilcher was raised by her paternal grandmother until she was thirteen. Then, her father married, quit his music career, and brought her to live with him in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, where she joined Ebenezer Baptist Church. She attended Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School for a year before entering Girls' Latin School. She remembers the riots in Roxbury after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and her uncle, Marcus Wilcher, working for the Community Coalition for Media Change. Wilcher enjoyed learning French and Latin in high school, and continued her language studies at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Wilcher spent part of her senior year studying in France, where she was introduced to Maoism, Marxism, Socialism, and black French theorists like Frantz Fanon.

Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_003, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher graduated from Mount Holyoke College with her bachelor's degree in French and philosophy in 1973. She moved to Harlem, New York, and earned her master's degree in urban policy from the New School for Social Research. Her direct experience with policy issues helped her gain admission to Harvard Law School. Through the Black Law Students' Association, she met HistoryMakers Theodore Shaw and Derrick A. Bell Jr. She organized the Third World Conference on Human Rights at Harvard, which led to a controversy when she invited Libyan politician Mohammed Abdul-Assiz to the event. In 1978, Wilcher clerked for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund while the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on Regents of California vs. Bakke. In 1980, she served as an attorney for the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C. Five years later, she became associate counsel for civil rights on the House Committee on Education and Labor. She also reflects upon the value of positive

reinforcement.

Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_004, TRT: 0:28:28 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher worked as associate counsel for civil rights for the House Committee on Education and Labor under HistoryMaker Augustus F. “Gus” Hawkins. When the Reagan administration and Attorney General Edwin Meese sought to undo affirmative action laws established under President Lyndon Johnson, Wilcher defended affirmative action in the media. Other government workers sent her tips about which government agencies to review for compliance with anti-discrimination laws. In 1990, she left to work for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, where she continued to fight for affirmative action. In 1994, Wilcher joined the Clinton Administration as the deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor Employment Standards Administration. She conducted compliance reviews and often published the findings online to raise awareness of discrimination. She recalls egregious cases at a North Carolina aircraft repair company, an Alabama bank, and a software company for NASA.

Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_005, TRT: 0:28:23 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher implemented a discrimination test while she was deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor Employment. The test, which featured black and white applicants who were equally qualified, exposed subtle discrimination in the banking industry. Wilcher recalls her own experience with discrimination when she was followed around by a store employee while shopping. In 2001, she became the executive director of Americans for a Fair Chance and founded Wilcher Global LLC to provide training and consultation for companies trying to implement diversity. Wilcher remembers the substantial support for affirmative action from students, private industry and the military in the wake of the Grotter vs. Bollinger, 2003 case. She received multiple awards from the NAACP for her service. Wilcher reflects upon the accomplishments of HistoryMaker Arthur Fletcher in establishing affirmative action, the status of affirmative action and her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Shirley Jean Wilcher, Section A2005_154_001_006, TRT: 0:10:17 ?

Shirley Jean Wilcher’s extended family supported her throughout her career. Her maternal grandfather traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts while in a wheelchair to see her graduate from Harvard Law School, and her maternal grandmother held the Bible when she was sworn in as deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor. Wilcher reflects upon her decision not to have children, her life, and her legacy. She offers advice to the African American community and shares her concern about the low numbers of African American men in higher education. She concludes by describing how she would like to be remembered.