

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lynn Carol Allen

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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>	Allen, Lynn Carol, 1951-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 27, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:12:11).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education administrator and gymnastics coach Lynn Carol Allen (1951 - ) co-founded Tri-Star Gymnastics outside of Chicago in the town of Forest Park. Tri-Star serves the gymnastics community of the near western suburbs and the City of Chicago. Allen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 27, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_222
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Tri-Star Gymnastics founder and multicultural education specialist, Lynn Allen was born October 22, 1951, in Nashville, Tennessee to educators, Richard and Ruby Stephenson. After having lived in Fort Chafee, Arkansas, the family moved to Chicago where Allen attended Copernicus, Burnside, and McDade elementary schools. Playing the piano and saxophone, Allen graduated from Harlan High School in June of 1969. At the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Allen majored in secondary education and minored in physical education; in her junior year, she began taking tumbling and gymnastics classes and made the women's gymnastics team.

Graduating in June of 1973, Allen began teaching history at Chicago's Unity High School; at the same time, she also started a gymnastics club. Allen went on to open Lynn Allen's Gymnastics Center on July 5, 1977, to train children between the ages of 2 and 18; over time, the program moved from a tiny storefront to a larger warehouse space on Chicago's South Side. Allen's gymnastics school was featured in several local newspapers, including *The Chatham Citizen*, the April/May 1982 issue of *Dollars and Sense* magazine, and on the television news magazine *Two on Two* with Harry Porterfield in 1981 on WBBM Channel 2 in Chicago.

In 1983, the program moved to the Oak Park, Illinois, recreation department. In September of 1988, Allen's Tri-Star Gymnastics, Inc. was established as a completely independent non-profit organization and moved to a 7,200 square foot warehouse; five years later the program moved to Forest Park. Tri-Star Gymnastics remains a culturally diverse program that serves some 800 children per week from Oak Park, Forest Park, River Forest, Maywood, Cicero, Berwyn and throughout the Chicago Metropolitan area.

Allen later returned to college to earn her M.A. degree in school leadership in 2003, and became the Director of Multicultural Education for Oak Park School District 97 in November of 2003.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lynn Carol Allen was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 27, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education administrator and gymnastics coach Lynn Carol Allen (1951 - ) co-founded Tri-Star Gymnastics outside of Chicago in the town of Forest Park. Tri-Star serves the gymnastics community of the near western suburbs and the City of Chicago.

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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:

Allen, Lynn Carol, 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Allen, Lynn Carol, 1951- --Interviews

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African American women executives--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African American women teachers--Interviews

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Women gymnasts--Interviews

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Gymnastics coaches--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:

Education Administrator

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Lynn Carol Allen, September 27, 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).

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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 Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:50  
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Lynn Carol Allen was born on October 22, 1951 to Ruby Jordan Stephenson and Richard Stephenson, Jr. Her maternal ancestor Celia Turman escaped slavery by swimming across the Mississippi River. Another maternal ancestor, Matilda Polk, was a slave of President James Knox Polk. Allen's mother grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and many of her relatives taught at Fisk University. Allen's father was born in Nashville, and lived with his mother and stepfather. Her parents met in elementary school, attended Pearl High School together, and married after graduating from Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College. When Allen was three years old, her family moved to Chatham in Chicago, Illinois. Her father worked as a lab assistant at the University of Chicago, and later as a principal. Her mother taught at Austin O. Sexton Elementary School. They lived in a newer neighborhood, and Allen played with her brother on a dirt hill by their home. Although the community was close-knit, Allen experienced bullying.

African American women executives--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American women teachers--Interviews.

Women gymnasts--Interviews.

Gymnastics coaches--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:50  
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Lynn Carol Allen struggled academically and socially at Chicago's Burnside Elementary School. In fifth grade, she transferred to the newly-built James E. McDade Elementary School and developed an interest in history and social issues. She wrote a letter to President John Kennedy about the treatment of Native Americans and received a response from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Allen remembers President Kennedy and the grief that followed his assassination. She watched civil rights marches on television and aspired to join the protests in the South. Allen was close friends with Charlotte Thurston, who was later married to Conrad Walter Worrill and worked on Harold Washington's mayoral campaign. Chatham, her childhood neighborhood, was all-black and primarily middle class. As a girl, Allen spent her time playing at Tuley Park or reading in the library. She attended John Marshall Harlan High School, where she learned to play alto saxophone and became very involved in the school band.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20  
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Lynn Carol Allen's social life at Chicago's John Marshall Harlan High School revolved around the band. She enjoyed watching Star Trek with her family, and listened to the Beatles. Because of her thorough history education at James E. McDade Elementary School, Allen paid close attention to the Civil Rights Movement. She was familiar with the Nation of Islam, as Warith Mohammed was married to her neighbor's sister. She participated in a school walkout following Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. In 1969, Allen matriculated at University of Illinois at Chicago. She explains her decision to wear her hair in an afro upon entering college. During her freshman year, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were assassinated, and Allen remembers being wary of the Black Panther Party. She describes the difference between the Black Panthers and the Black Muslims. Allen taught at Unity Catholic High School from 1973 to 1979, where she witnessed a decline in educational quality.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30  
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Lynn Carol Allen experienced culture shock at the majority-white University of Illinois at Chicago, but enjoyed her African American studies classes. In her junior year, Allen hired a student athlete to teach her gymnastics. She spent hours in the gym and eventually made the team. Allen graduated in 1973 and began teaching at Unity Catholic High School. She started one of Chicago's first gymnastics team, and her athletes competed against white suburban schools. In 1977, she established Lynn Allen's Gymnastics Center to train girls in gymnastics from an early age. When she tried to host a meet at her gym, other contestants assumed it would be unsafe to travel to the South Side of Chicago. Harry Porterfield featured a story on her gym and one of its promising gymnasts, Agina Simpkins. After trouble with her landlord, Allen moved her gym to the South Side YMCA before relocating to the Oak Park, Illinois Park District. Allen talks about iconic black women gymnasts Dominique Dawes and Dianne Durham.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:51  
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Lynn Carol Allen's most talented student, Agina Simpkins, later made it onto the Olympic team with financial support from Oprah Winfrey. Allen coached at the Oak Park Parks Department for five years before leaving in 1987 to start Tri-Star Gymnastics in Forest Park, Illinois. The community embraced the new business, and Allen picked up gymnastics students from all over the Chicago area. She particularly prided herself on the diversity of her students in race, ethnicity and body type. Though many coaches only take athletes with the most competitive bodies for gymnastics, Allen focused on helping her athletes have fun. Tri-Star Gymnastics hosted an annual gym show that attracted over two thousand spectators. Allen talks about the expansion of gymnastics programs in Chicago, Illinois, and the benefits of gymnastics for young people. She also describes the sport's dangerous aspects. Allen praises Jesse White's tumbling program and considers her own impact.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_006, TRT: 0:28:20  
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Lynn Carol Allen became involved with the Oak Park, Illinois School District when she served on its strategic planning committee, which focused on helping teachers present a multicultural curriculum and making the schools inclusive to people of different backgrounds. While serving on the committee, she successfully advocated for the removal of a racist mural in one of the schools. After earning her master's degree in administration, Allen was hired as the director of multicultural education for the Oak Park School District in 2003. In this position, she worked closely with teachers to increase cultural competency and to improve interactions with and knowledge of diverse cultures. Allen also mediates between teachers and parents of various backgrounds, focusing on improving communication. Allen talks about the achievement gap between black and white children in Oak Park and describes her hopes and concerns for the greater African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Lynn Carol Allen, Section A2005\_222\_001\_007, TRT: 0:18:30  
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Lynn Carol Allen grew up as the oldest of four children. At the time of the interview, her brother Rick Stephenson was a doctor, George Stephenson was a judge in Minnesota, and Dave Stephenson worked as a cameraman. Allen reflects upon her life, and describes her gym, Tri-Star Gymnastics, as her legacy.

At the time of the interview, her daughter Kiona Allen was enrolled in Perelman School of Medicine at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and her son Kyle Allen was writing a book. Allen concludes her interview by describing how she would like to be remembered for her contributions to the wellbeing of African American children and for bringing diversity to the community of Oak Park, Illinois.