

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Effie Lee Morris

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Morris, Effie Lee |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, |
| Dates: | October 11, 2005 and October 13, 2005 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2005 |
| Physical Description: | 8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:36:01). |
| Abstract: | Library administrator Effie Lee Morris (1921 - 2009) founded the Children's Historical and Research Collection, now known as the Effie Lee Morris Historical and Research Collection, at the Children's Center of the San Francisco Public Library. She was the first female chairperson of the Library of Congress and the first African American president of the Public Library Association. Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 11, 2005 and October 13, 2005, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2005_242 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Public children's library administrator Effie Lee Morris was born on April 20, 1921, in Richmond, Virginia, to Erma Lee Caskie Morris and William Hamilton Morris. Morris is the eldest of two daughters. She grew up in Richmond until the age of eight when her family moved to Cleveland, Ohio for her father's job as head chef with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad Company. Morris can trace her family history back to slavery and owns the slave papers of her paternal great grandmother. Morris loved to read at an early age and grew up trading books with her friends and family members. She attended Robert Fulton Elementary School and John Adams High School in Cleveland. Morris was her high school class's co-valedictorian with three other students. Morris earned her B.A. and M.L.S. degrees at Case Western University.

Morris began her career as a public librarian at the Cleveland Public Library in 1946. There, she specialized in working with children and children's literature. Morris moved to New York in 1955 after working for the Philadelphia Public Library in order to work for the American Library Association. That same year, she went on to work for the New York Library for the Blind and served as the first female chairperson of the Library of Congress. Morris also served as president of the National Braille Association for two terms. In 1963, Morris moved to San Francisco, California and became the first Coordinator of Children's Services at the San Francisco Public Library. In 1964, Morris established the Children's Historical and Research Collection at the Children's Center of the San Francisco Library. In 1968, she founded the San Francisco Chapter of the Women's National Book Association, and in 1971, Morris became the first African American president of the Public Library Association. She officially left her position as Coordinator of Children's Services of the San Francisco Library in 1977, and in 1981, the children's literature collection that she started was officially named the Effie Lee Morris Historical and Research Collection.

Morris continues to be an advocate for children and children's literature. Morris and the San Francisco Public Library hold an annual lecture series that features a children's literature author and illustrator. Some of the lecturers have included children's book authors Nikki Grimes, Milly Lee, Pamela Munoz and Tomie dePaola. Morris has received several awards for her work and contributions to children's literature, including the Silver Spur Award for enhancing the quality of life and economic vitality of San Francisco; the Women's National Book Association's Award for Extraordinary Contribution to the World of Books; and the Grolier Foundation Award.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Effie Lee Morris was conducted by Loretta Henry on October 11, 2005 and October 13, 2005, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Library administrator Effie Lee Morris (1921 - 2009) founded the Children's Historical and Research Collection, now known as the Effie Lee Morris Historical and Research Collection, at the Children's Center of the San Francisco Public Library. She was the first female chairperson of the Library of Congress and the first African American president of the Public Library Association.

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:

Morris, Effie Lee

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Morris, Effie Lee--Interviews

African American women librarians--California--San Francisco--Interviews

African American children's librarians--California--San Francisco--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

San Francisco Public Library

Occupations:

Library Administrator

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Effie Lee Morris, October 11, 2005 and October 13, 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 Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_001_001, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Effie Lee Morris was born April 20, 1921 in Richmond, Virginia to Erma Caskie Morris and William Morris. Her maternal great-great-grandmother was enslaved in Henrico County, Virginia, and her maternal grandfather was a musician. Morris' mother was born in the late 19th century and worked as a teacher. Her mother's youngest sister, Effie, lived in New York City's Dunbar Apartments near Countee Cullen, Ida Cullen Cooper and Matthew A. Henson. Morris' father was born around Norfolk, Virginia, although he attended school in Connecticut. When the family moved from Richmond to Cleveland, Ohio, he worked as an executive chef on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway, and was in charge of Frank M. Whittaker's private car. Growing up, Morris enjoyed reading and played with her sister, Mary Morris Pettiford, who later worked as an administrative assistant at University of Virginia College of Medicine. Morris describes her parents' siblings and her family memorabilia. She also talks about generational differences.

African American women librarians--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

African American children's librarians--California--San Francisco--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_001_002, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Effie Lee Morris spent her early childhood in Richmond, Virginia where she grew up in a tight-knit, black community. Growing up, she attended Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church and enjoyed reading, although she was unable to visit the public library. Due to segregation, Morris, her sister and their mother often traveled by train to Washington, D.C. to visit institutions like the National Zoological Park and the Smithsonian Institution. She attended elementary school in Richmond through the fourth grade, when her family relocated to Cleveland, Ohio for her father's career with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. In Cleveland, she attended Robert Fulton Elementary School with a diverse student body, including Rabbi Sanford Rosen. She attended John Adams High School and participated in trips to Nela Park, Karamu House and Severance Hall, where she saw the Cleveland Orchestra. She also describes her neighbors in Richmond and Cleveland, including performers Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Shirley Temple.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Effie Lee Morris attended Cleveland's John Adams High School, where she was co-valedictorian of her class. Morris was active in the Cleveland chapter of the Debs About Town and wrote for the school paper. As they lived far from Cleveland's African American community, Morris' mother drove her and her sister to visit friends there. When Morris was unfairly banned from swimming in a Cleveland public pool, she was assisted by powerful community members like Councilman John Hubbard. She aspired to become a social worker or an architect, although many of her family members taught. Morris recalls notable Cleveland figures and the impact of World War II on the city, as well as attendees to the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry in Clinton, Tennessee like Reverend Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. and Ashley Bryan. Though

Morris hoped to attend Oberlin College, she received a scholarship to the University of Chicago. Excluded from the dormitories, she lived her first year in the Frederick C. Robie House.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_002_004, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Effie Lee Morris resided in the Frederick C. Robie House during her first year at the University of Chicago. After several years, she transferred to Western Reserve University's Flora Stone Mather College for Women in Cleveland, where she completed her B.A., B.L.S. and M.L.S. degrees and took courses in children's library services from Harriet G. Long. Upon graduating in 1946, Morris worked in children's services at Cleveland Public Library. There, she developed a book list for the library's inaugural Negro History Week. In 1954, she taught library students for a semester at Atlanta University. During this time, she attended Atlanta's First Congregational Church, pastored by Homer McEwen. At an American Library Association convention in Philadelphia, Augusta Braxton Baker encouraged Morris to work for New York Public Library. She was then selected to work at New York City's Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Morris also explains her interest in children's literature.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_002_005, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Effie Lee Morris worked as a liaison between the Library of Congress' Division for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in Washington, D.C. and the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky. During this time, Morris served as president of the National Braille Association, Inc. for two terms. When she encountered difficulty with New York City's Xavier Society for the Blind, Morris received support from Cardinal Francis Spellman. In 1963, Morris moved to San Francisco, California where she became coordinator of children's services for San Francisco Public Library. There, Morris developed departmental standards, including for staff, books and services, and instituted advisory councils at each of the library's twenty-eight branches. Through her work with preschool children, she also created Dial-A-Story. Morris describes Hellen Keller's eightieth birthday party, which was hosted by the American Foundation for the Blind; challenges she faced as a librarian; and owls' significance to her.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_002_006, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Effie Lee Morris coordinated children's services for the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). In 1964, SFPL created the Effie Lee Morris Historical and Research Collection of Children's Literature, inspired by her dedication to children's services as well as her book selection criteria. From 1978, Morris worked for Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich and taught at Mills College in Oakland, California. She was a board member and award recipient of the Women's National Book Association, and she directed the Notable Children's Books Committee for the American Library Association, and she served on the Newbery and Caldecott awards committees. She contributed research on children to Lowell Martin's seminal monograph, 'Library Response to Urban Change: A Study of the Chicago Public Library.' Morris describes her M.A. thesis on the Negro character in children's literature; the Coretta Scott King Award; her community involvement in San Francisco; and the annual Effie Lee Morris Lecture in Children's Literature.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_002_007, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Effie Lee Morris received the Silver SPUR Award and the Reading the World Award for her commitment to children's services in San Francisco, California. In 1974, Morris appeared on the popular television series, 'What's My Line,'

along with Governor James Earl “Jimmy” Carter, Jr. She met her husband, Leonard Jones, when they both served on the board of San Francisco’s Booker T. Washington Community Center. A graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, Jones worked in finance and was active on university committees until his death in 1993, after which the university dedicated a scholarship in his memory. Morris describes her favorite books and authors, including ‘The Little Prince’ by Antoine de Saint-Exupery and ‘The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency’ by Alexander McCall Smith. She talks about her interest in hip-hop music, which was inspired, in part, by Wu-Tang Clan and John Steptoe. Morris also reflects upon the impact of technology for children’s literature and library services.

Video Oral History Interview with Effie Lee Morris, Section A2005_242_002_008, TRT: 0:10:30 ?

Effie Lee Morris traveled throughout Europe as well as to Kenya, Senegal, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia and South Africa, where she participated in the International Board on Books for Young People conference in Cape Town. With the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Morris helped to develop a project to donate one hundred books on African American subjects to Cape Town’s Delft Public Library. She describes her plan to organize and archive her papers and to travel domestically. Morris concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.