

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle

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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>	Preckwinkle, Toni Reed, 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 19, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:26:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	County commissioner The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle (1947 - ) served as a Chicago City alderman for nineteen years before becoming the first woman to serve as president of the Cook County Board. Preckwinkle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_035
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on March 17, 1947. She attended Gorman Elementary School and Como Park Jr. High School. Preckwinkle graduated from Washington High School in St. Paul in 1965. She then moved to Chicago to attend the University of Chicago, where she graduated with her B.A. degree in general studies in 1969. Preckwinkle graduated with her M.A.T. degree in teaching from the University of Chicago in 1977.

After being hired as a history teacher for Chicago Public Schools, Preckwinkle began her career in politics with two unsuccessful bids for the City of Chicago's 4th Ward aldermanic post in 1983 and 1987, respectively. In between these bids, Preckwinkle was appointed development officer for the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club in 1984. From 1985 to 1988, she served as an economic development coordinator for the City of Chicago. Preckwinkle was eventually named executive director for the Chicago Jobs Council in 1988. In 1991, Preckwinkle won the 4th Ward aldermanic seat, defeating a 17-year incumbent by 109 votes. She would go on to serve five terms, overseeing the redevelopment of the Kenwood, Oakland, Douglas, Grand Boulevard and Hyde Park neighborhoods. During Preckwinkle's nineteen year aldermanic tenure, she became known as a Chicago City Council's progressive member and a champion for affordable housing. Preckwinkle was also a co-sponsor of the living wage ordinances that passed the City Council in 1998 and 2002.

Preckwinkle's political service earned her Best Alderman Award from the Independent Voters of Illinois-Independent Precinct Organization (IVI-IPO), a not-for-profit, multi-partisan, independent political organization, in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2005 and 2008. She was also the recipient of the 1997 and 2009 Leon Despres Awards, named after the legendary, iconoclastic Chicago alderman. Starting in 1992, she also served as the Democratic Committeeman for the 4th Ward. Preckwinkle declared her intention to run for Cook County Board President in 2008. Two years later, she won a hotly contested democratic primary for the seat. Preckwinkle swept through the

November 2010 general election, becoming the first female to serve as President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. She is married to Zeus Preckwinkle, has two children, and three grandchildren.

Toni Preckwinkle was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 19, 2012.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 19, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. County commissioner The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle (1947 - ) served as a Chicago City alderman for nineteen years before becoming the first woman to serve as president of the Cook County Board.

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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:

Preckwinkle, Toni Reed, 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Preckwinkle, Toni Reed, 1947- --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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Cook County (Ill.). Board of County Commissioners

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## Occupations:

County Commissioner

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, April 19, 2012.  
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 The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, Section  
A2012\_035\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:12 ?

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle was born on March 17, 1947 in St. Paul, Minnesota to Beatrice Schuck Bailey and Samuel Reed. Her maternal great-grandfather, Charles Jackson, was born a slave in Georgia, and joined the Union Army during the Civil War. After migrating to St. Paul, he met Preckwinkle's great-grandmother, Mattie Porter Jackson, who had moved with her family from Washington, D.C. They settled in Stillwater, Minnesota, where he found work as a barber. Preckwinkle's maternal grandmother, Phoebe Jackson Schuck was raised in Stillwater, and married Hugh Schuck, who came from Topeka, Kansas. Preckwinkle's paternal grandmother, Theoria Woods Reed, was raised in Missouri by her maternal great-grandmother, Amanda Woods; and moved to St. Paul to live with an aunt at thirteen years old. Preckwinkle's parents were both born in St. Paul, and attended the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. They married in 1941, prior to her father's U.S. military service in North Africa during World War II.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, Section  
A2012\_035\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:55 ?

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle grew up in a working class neighborhood on the North End of St. Paul, Minnesota. She was the oldest of four siblings, and often rode her bike to visit her paternal grandmother. Preckwinkle began her education at the predominantly white Gorman School, where she was a strong student and often fought to protect herself from racially motivated bullying. In addition to her own experiences of discrimination, she also noticed prejudice directed towards Native Americans in Minnesota. Preckwinkle was influenced by her mother, who was active with the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and the Unitarian church. Her mother also worked at the St. Paul Public Library, which led Preckwinkle to develop a love of reading at an early age. Because of her high test scores, Preckwinkle was selected for an advanced math and science program at Como Park Junior High School. Upon entering Washington High School, she became involved in the Girls Athletic Association and the world affairs club.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, Section  
A2012\_035\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:25 ?

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle was a star athlete and the president of the Girls Athletic Association at Washington High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was also interested in current events, and was once cautioned by a teacher to be less outspoken, so as not to appear communist. Preckwinkle became involved in politics at sixteen years old, when she volunteered for the campaign of Katie McWatt, the first black woman to run for the St. Paul City Council. Upon graduating in 1965, Preckwinkle matriculated at the University of Chicago, where she studied under economist Gerhard Meyer and urban historian Richard Wade. Although she was largely uninvolved in campus activism, Preckwinkle became active in local politics, and joined Paul Simon's campaign for Illinois treasurer. She graduated in 1969, and opted to pursue a master's degree in history education. She wrote her master's thesis on William L. Dawson, a prominent African American U.S. congressman; and began teaching in the Chicago Public Schools in 1972.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, Section  
A2012\_035\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:23 ?

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle met her husband, Zeus Preckwinkle, while attending the University of Chicago. After graduating in 1969, she began teaching, and continued to follow politics in Chicago, Illinois. She admired

Alderman Leon Despres, who was outspoken about civil rights issues; and worked on Ralph Metcalfe's campaign following his break from Mayor Richard J. Daley over police brutality. She also contributed to Harold Washington mayoral campaign in the special election following Mayor Daley's death in 1977, and Larry Bloom's aldermanic campaign in 1979. Preckwinkle quit teaching upon the birth of her son in 1981, and decided to run for an alderman position. She lost to Timothy C. Evans, who had Mayor Washington's support; and, in the interim until the next aldermanic election, worked for the Hyde Park Neighborhood Club and the Harold Washington administration. She lost again in 1987, but was successful in 1991 and became the full-time alderman of Chicago's 4th Ward.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle, Section A2012\_035\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:10 ?

The Honorable Toni Preckwinkle supported Eugene Sawyer's campaign for the mayoralty of Chicago, Illinois after Harold Washington's death. At this time, she was employed at the Department of Economic Development, where she remained until joining the Chicago Jobs Council in 1988. In 1991, Preckwinkle ran again for an alderman seat, and defeated the incumbent Timothy C. Evans by 105 votes. She had strong support in Hyde Park, but was less popular in her ward's majority-black north and west sides. Preckwinkle entered the city council with plans to improve the living conditions in those communities, especially the Ida B. Wells Homes and Darrow Homes. She supported a Chicago Housing Authority initiative to replace public housing with mixed-income housing, which was intended to reduce crime. She also endorsed Barack Obama's campaign for a seat in the Illinois Senate, which was vacated by Alice Palmer after she decided to run for the seat of former U.S. Congressman Mel Reynolds.