

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth Standard

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Standard, Kenneth G., 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard,
Dates:	January 14, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:26:28).
Abstract:	Lawyer Kenneth Standard (1936 -) has been an employment and labor lawyer for over forty years, and served as president of the New York State Bar Association. Standard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 14, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_003
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer Kenneth G. Standard is a prominent lawyer and diversity activist. As a child, civil rights activism was an important part of his family life; his elder sister worked for the national office of the NAACP, and from a young age he heard about and met NAACP lawyers like Thurgood Marshall and Charles Hamilton Houston. Standard graduated from Harvard University with his A.B. degree, and went on to receive his LL.B. degree from Harvard School of Law in 1962.

In 1967, Standard was hired as an attorney with the Bristol-Myers pharmaceutical company. In 1968, he was promoted to counsel of the products division; by 1970, he had been promoted again to become the division's vice president. Standard continued his legal education, receiving his LL.M. degree from New York University's School of Law in 1971. In 1988, he began working at the Consolidated Edison Company (Con Ed) as the assistant general counsel for labor relations. In 1999, Standard joined the law firm Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, where he served as special counsel. From 2004 to 2005, he served as president of the New York State Bar Association, and focused on increasing diversity within the legal field. In 2004, Standard joined the law firm of Epstein, Becker & Green as a member in its National Labor & Employment Practice. During this time, he also developed and chaired the firm's nationwide diversity committee.

In 2006, the New York State Bar Association created the Kenneth G. Standard Internship program in his honor, which is specifically designed to support law students from a diverse range of backgrounds. In 2011, Standard received the American Bar Association's Alexander Award for Lifetime Achievement in Pipeline Diversity; and, in 2013, he was elected fellow by the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers.

Standard and his late wife, Valerie Ann Salmon, have a daughter, Alison, and two sons, Devin and Trevor.

Kenneth Standard was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 14, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth Standard was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 14, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Lawyer Kenneth Standard (1936 -) has been an employment and labor lawyer for over forty years, and served as president of the New York State Bar 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:

Standard, Kenneth G., 1936-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Standard, Kenneth G., 1936---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 Kenneth Standard, January 14, 2014. 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 Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_001, TRT: 1:29:07
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Kenneth Standard was born on September 4, 1936 in Brooklyn, New York, New York. His father, Byron Stafford Standard, was born on a Barbadian plantation and immigrated to the United States in 1912, following his sisters. He settled in Brooklyn, worked as an elevator operator and served in the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. Standard describes his father's personality and his Bajan heritage. During the Great Depression, Standard's father lost his job and remained unemployed until 1942. Standard's mother, Winifred Lizette

Sealy, was born in Barbados on a plantation her family owned. In 1920, she immigrated to the United States, where she met Standard's father. Standard has four older siblings; his oldest sister worked for the NAACP. When he was two, his father almost sawed his fingers off. As a boy, he lived in an Old Law Tenement apartment in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn a working class, multi-ethnic community in New York City. Standard attended P.S. 133 William A. Butler and P.S. 47 elementary schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_002, TRT: 2:30:41
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Kenneth Standard attended P.S. 133 William A. Butler and P.S. 47 elementary schools in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, New York, until his family moved to Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. In fourth grade, he enrolled at P.S. 44 Marcus Garvey, a segregated elementary school, but transferred to the gifted program at Horace E. Green Elementary School in Brooklyn, which he graduated from in 1950. He enjoyed history and literature in school. He talks about the academic influence of his elder sisters, his family's Christmas celebration, and spending time with his mother. Standard describes his experience as a lifeguard and Eagle Scout. He was awarded his Eagle Scout badge as an adult. He attended Boys High School in Brooklyn and graduated in 1954, the same week his family was unexpectedly evicted. Standard was rejected by the Naval ROTC, but he was admitted to Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The year he entered was the first year Harvard did not have residential segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_003, TRT: 3:30:10
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Kenneth Standard attended Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1954 to 1958. He describes his first weeks as an undergraduate student, and his freshman year suitemates. Standard financed his undergraduate education through a mixture of loans, scholarships, summer earnings, and money from his father and sisters. Standard describes his personal growth at Harvard University where he developed several good friendships. He earned a B.A. degree in English literature from Harvard University in 1958 and was admitted to Harvard Law School (HLS). In the fall of 1958, Standard met his wife, Valerie Standard, and the two married in secret a few months later. Standard was the only black student in his class at Harvard Law School when he entered in 1959. He describes the class size, faculty and curriculum at HLS. Though he did not experience any discrimination from the faculty at HLS, he felt the academic environment was hostile. Standard talks briefly about playing squash at the Harvard Club of New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_004, TRT: 4:27:33
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Kenneth Standard and his wife Valerie Standard worked a variety of jobs during his time at Harvard Law School (HLS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Standard's first daughter was born in 1962. Standard graduated from Harvard Law in 1962 with an LL.B. degree. He explains the transition from the LL.B. to the J.D. degree within the legal profession during the 1970s. After graduation, Standard settled in New York City where he passed the bar examination. In August 1962, he joined the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as an enforcement attorney. Standard left the SEC in May 1963 for the New York State Moreland Act Commission on Alcoholic Beverage Control. After the committee was defunded in 1964, Standard was offered a position as a trial attorney with the New York Telephone Company. He describes meeting judge George Bundy

Smith, his experience as the telephone company's only black employee, and trying his final case. In 1967, Standard left the company for an assistant staff attorney position at Bristol-Myers.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_005, TRT: 5:30:56
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Kenneth Standard joined Bristol-Myers as an assistant staff attorney in 1967. He describes the size and structure of the company's legal department as well as the state of the pharmaceutical industry in 1967. Standard helped organize the Monarch Crown Corporation, a subsidiary of Bristol-Myers which sold products to the U.S. military. In 1969, Standard was promoted to division counsel, and in 1971, he was promoted to division vice president, making him the youngest vice president and highest-level black executive in the company. Also in 1971, Standard earned his LL.M. from New York University School of Law. Standard's proudest accomplishment during his tenure was opening the door for more racial and gender diversity at Bristol-Myers. Standard describes the family-oriented culture cultivated by the company and the company events he brought his wife and children to over the years. In the early 1980s, Bristol-Myers underwent management overhaul and company reorganization; in 1984, Standard was fired.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_006, TRT: 6:32:36
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Kenneth Standard was fired from his position as vice president of the products division at Bristol-Myers in 1984. He then worked at the New York City Board of Education as director of legal services from 1985 through 1989. In this role, Standard improved the operation of the department. In 1989, Standard joined Con Edison as assistant general counsel; he spent two years resolving an employment discrimination class action lawsuit filed against Con Edison. In 2000, he joined the law firm of Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. Standard describes his work with the Black Executive Exchange Program, which sends executives of color to speak at historically black colleges and universities. Standard began volunteering with the Harvard Club of New York in the mid-1960s and he eventually became president of the club. As president, Standard oversaw the planning, financing and construction of an addition to the Harvard Club of New York's clubhouse in 2003. Standard describes settling a lawsuit which opposed the proposed expansion.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_007, TRT: 7:30:30
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Kenneth Standard talks about the additions to the Harvard Club of New York's clubhouse and describes its membership procedures. Standard joined the firm of Epstein, Becker & Green in 2004, and was appointed the firm's first general counsel. Standard was also elected President of the New York State Bar Association in 2004, making him the second African American president elect after Archibald R. Murray. He describes his presidential tenure, including the establishment of Law School Day, a day-long event for New York City public school students at one or more of New York City's law schools. He also talks about other black members of the New York State Bar Association. Standard remembers an instance where he was racially profiled, and talks about unlawful judiciary decisions, eradicating custodial interrogation, and police misconduct involving the death of twenty year-old Danroy Henry in 2010. Standard considers retirement and his influence on his children and grandchildren.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_008, TRT: 8:18:00
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Kenneth Standard remembers instances of racial discrimination in elementary school. He critiques the high-cost of a legal education and suggests reforms to resolve the unmet legal needs of the public. Standard also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and talks about contemporary American social justice efforts. He describes upon the factors that contributed to his success, including his high-quality elementary education. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Standard, Section A2014_003_001_009, TRT: 9:36:55
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Kenneth Standard narrates his photographs.