

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ernie Terrell

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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>	Terrell, Ernie, 1939-2005
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 25, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:53:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Music producer, boxer, and singer Ernie Terrell (1939 - 2014 ) was a Hall of Fame heavyweight boxing champion and the leader of the musical group, Ernie Terrell and the Heavyweights. Terrell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 25, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_093
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Heavyweight boxer and entertainer Ernest Terrell was born on April 4, 1939 in Belzoni, Mississippi. This tall and lanky athlete retired from the profession after 15 years of fighting with a record of 46 wins - 21 of which were knockouts - and only nine losses.

Terrell began boxing professionally in 1957 and simultaneously launched a popular singing group in Chicago with his sister, Jean Terrell, who later replaced Diana Ross with the Supremes. During his first year of boxing, he won all five of his fights, knocking out three of his opponents. He continued to excel, winning fight after fight over the next several years. Terrell also continued to perform with his musical group, Ernie Terrell and the Heavyweights.

After the World Boxing Association stripped Muhammad Ali of his title as heavyweight champion in 1965, Terrell finally got a chance for the label. He defeated Eddie Machen for the vacant title and retained it until February 6, 1967. That day, he fought in his most famous match against Muhammad Ali in Houston, Texas and lost after 15 grueling rounds. Ali, who had changed his name from Cassius Clay after converting to Islam, took offense to Terrell using his "slave name" and repeatedly shouted, "What's my name?" throughout the match. Terrell lost his two remaining fights that year and announced his retirement in December. However, he returned to the ring two years later, beating Sonny Moore on December 15 in 10 rounds. Terrell continued to win his matches, and on June 23, 1973, he earned another shot at becoming a heavyweight champion. However, Chuck Wepner defeated him in 12 rounds in an extremely controversial decision. Terrell boxed in his last fight on September 23 of that year.

After retiring permanently from boxing, Terrell became a music producer in Chicago. Terrell also had a brief stint in politics when he lost the 1987 election for alderman of Chicago's 34th ward. In October of 2004, he was inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame.

Terrell passed away in December of 2014 at age 75.

Ernie Terrell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 25, 2002.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ernie Terrell was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 25, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Music producer, boxer, and singer Ernie Terrell (1939 - 2014 ) was a Hall of Fame heavyweight boxing champion and the leader of the musical group, Ernie Terrell and the Heavyweights.

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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:

Terrell, Ernie, 1939-2005

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Terrell, Ernie, 1939-2005--Interviews

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African American boxers--Interviews.

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African American singers--Interviews.

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African American sound recording executives and producers--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:

Boxer

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Music Producer

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Singer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers|SportsMakers

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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 Ernie Terrell, June 25, 2002. 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 Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Ernie Terrell was born on April 4th, 1939 in Inverness, Mississippi to Annie and Lovick Terrell, both also from Inverness. His maternal grandfather was Jake Payne, and his paternal grandfather was Lovick Terrell, Sr. Terrell describes his upbringing in the segregated South in the 1940s. His family moved from Inverness to Belzoni, Mississippi in 1941, where they experienced racism as black land owners. Terrell attended a local makeshift elementary school with other black children, and he experienced racist bullying by white children, as well as an apathy and often antipathy from the white police. This, as well as witnessing the nearby Prisoner of War Camp in Belzoni, Mississippi during World War II added to a violent atmosphere during his childhood. Growing up poor in the rural South, Terrell enjoyed playing sports with other children and playing outdoors. In 1953, Terrell and his family relocated to Chicago, Illinois, for better economic opportunities.

African American boxers--Interviews.

African American singers--Interviews.

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:17 ?

Ernie Terrell lived in rural Belzoni, Mississippi until age fourteen, where he experienced racism and hostility from the white population. Living within a tight-knit black community, his parents understood there were very little opportunities for black people in the rural South. In 1953, Terrell's family moved to Chicago, Illinois, where their quality of life improved. At first, he had trouble with fitting in, but he soon adjusted to life in a big city. Terrell attended Barnard Elementary School and then Farragut High School, where he became involved in boxing. Before graduating from elementary school, he won his first Golden Gloves, and continued to train throughout his youth at a gym on Madison Avenue, in Chicago, Illinois. He won the Golden Gloves the next three years, excelling rapidly and boxing against grown men. In high school, Terrell also began playing guitar, performing occasionally with blues bands in the city.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Ernie Terrell began his boxing career and launched his singing career in 1957. He began performing at various venues in Chicago, Illinois with his brother and sister, Jean Terrell. At the same time, his boxing career took off, and he traveled around North America for matches and publicity, appearing on the Tonight Show with Ed Sullivan and the Merv Griffin Show. After winning all five of his fights his first year, he had continued success through the 1960s, boxing such heavyweights like Cleveland Williams, George Chuvalo, Zora Folley, and Eddie Machen, leading up to his 1965 World Boxing Association Heavyweight Championship title. Terrell developed a boxing style to complement his six foot, six inches frame. His singing career flourished, too, and with continued success traveling around the country, his band met Berry Gordy in Miami Beach, Florida in 1970, where he selected his sister, Jean Terrell to replace Diana Ross in the Supremes. Terrell continued to sing with his band, Ernie Terrell and the Heavyweights throughout the 1970s.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:20 ?

Ernie Terrell won the World Boxing Association's Heavyweight Championship

in 1965 at the Chicago Amphitheatre, defeating Eddie Machen. He won his next two matches, against George Chuvalo and Doug Jones, retaining his title. Then, in 1967, he and Muhammad Ali agreed to face each other. Terrell describes Ali's increasing antagonism in the months leading up to the match. Their antipathy toward each other escalated, which included Terrell's use of Ali's birth name, Cassius Clay, which led to Ali's brutality during the match, shouting "What's my name?" Terrell's defeat soon led to his first retirement. He returned two years later, winning numerous matches, until fighting Chuck Wepner, who ruthlessly beat Terrell in a fixed and unfair match. Terrell permanently retired in 1973. During his boxing career, he developed close relationships with both Joe Louis and Ezzard Charles. After his boxing retirement, he continued to tour with his band, including a trip to Thule Air Force Base in Greenland with his sister, Jean Terrell.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Ernie Terrell retired from boxing in 1973, and began a twenty-year long career of promoting boxing, carefully selecting matches that would produce the best fights. He described what makes a good promoter, and the current top fighters in boxing. Terrell later entered politics, running for Chicago Alderman in 1987. He started his own janitorial business, managing more than four hundred and fifty employees. Terrell and his wife, Maxine, have two children and two grandchildren. He then reflects on the changes to the industry since his retirement. Terrell describes his hopes and concerns for the black community, and what he hopes to be remembered for, including supporting African American businesses. He then reflects on his and his sister's, the Supreme's Jean Terrell, success, describing his mother's reaction. He then narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernie Terrell, Section A2002\_093\_001\_006, TRT: 0:18:57 ?

Ernie Terrell narrates his photographs.