

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Sherwood Dorsey

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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>	Dorsey, Robert Sherwood, 1923-2011
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 14, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:27:33).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mechanical engineer Robert Sherwood Dorsey (1923 - 2011 ) worked as a mechanical engineer for General Electric, where he helped develop engines for various commercial and military aircrafts from 1949 to 1987. After retiring from GE, he worked with Belcan, a consulting firm that analyzes problems associated with military engines. Dorsey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 14, 2005, in West Chester, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_063
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Engineer Robert Sherwood Dorsey was born on October 9, 1293 in Lafayette, Louisiana. The son of Rita Starling Allen and Willie Dorsey, he graduated from Phillis Wheatley High School in Houston, Texas. Enrolling in Prairie View College in 1941, Dorsey volunteered for the U.S. Army Reserves and studied engineering. Drafted into the segregated U.S. Army, Dorsey served in the 92nd Infantry Division and worked as a water purification specialist for a combat engineering battalion. Honorably discharged in March of 1946, Dorsey eventually enrolled at Ohio State University where he excelled at football and earned his B.S. degree in 1949 in mechanical engineering. Hired by General Electric, Dorsey helped develop the engines used in airplanes like the B-1, B-2, F-14, F-16, and F-18. He also participated in the joint venture between GE and French company SNECMA which created the CFM56 engines used in many commercial jets. After leaving GE in 1987, Dorsey worked with Belcan, a consulting firm, analyzing problems associated with military engines.

Ohio State University awarded Dorsey the Distinguished Football Alumnus Award and he has also received awards from the NCAA and the Cincinnati chapter of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame. An inductee into Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, and Pi Tau Sigma, the international mechanical engineering honor society, Dorsey is also a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. He served on the board of trustees for the Ohio State University and as the president of the National Alumni Association of the Ohio State University.

Dorsey was married to Helena Fredericka Harris and they had three daughters. Dorsey passed away on February 11, 2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey was conducted by Regennia Williams on March 14, 2005, in West Chester, Ohio, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mechanical engineer Robert Sherwood Dorsey (1923 - 2011 ) worked as a mechanical engineer for General Electric, where he helped develop engines for various commercial and military aircrafts from 1949 to 1987. After retiring from GE, he worked with Belcan, a consulting firm that analyzes problems associated with military engines.

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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:

Dorsey, Robert Sherwood, 1923-2011

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dorsey, Robert Sherwood, 1923-2011--Interviews

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African American engineers--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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General Electric Company.

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### Occupations:

Mechanical Engineer

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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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 Robert Sherwood Dorsey, March 14, 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 Robert Sherwood Dorsey, Section A2005\_063\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:26 ?

Robert Dorsey describes his childhood in Houston, Texas. Dorsey's mother, Rita Allen, was born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana. She raised Dorsey as a single parent, after divorcing his father, Willie Dorsey. When he was five years old,

Dorsey and his mother moved to Houston, which is where he spent the remainder of his childhood. Dorsey describes the segregated school system in Houston in the 1930s and the 1940s. He attended Phillis Wheatley High School, where his favorite subject was math. After graduating from high school in 1941, Dorsey enrolled in Prairie View College, where he enlisted in the U.S. Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) following the bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II.

African American families--Texas--Houston.

African American mothers.

Single parent families.

Segregation in education--Texas--Houston.

Prairie View A & M University.

Army Specialized Training Program (U.S.).

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey, Section A2005\_063\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Robert Dorsey began his B.S. degree in engineering at Prairie View College in 1941. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Dorsey enlisted in the U.S. Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). In the spring of 1944, Dorsey was drafted into the segregated U.S. Army, where he first served in the 92nd Infantry Division, and later in the combat engineering battalion as a water purification specialist. Dorsey served in Europe towards the end of World War II, and was honorably discharged from the military in March of 1946. After briefly attending Howard University to continue his engineering degree, Dorsey transferred to the Ohio State University, where he played collegiate football and received his B.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1949.

Prairie View A & M University.

Army Specialized Training Program (U.S.).

World War, 1914-1918--Participation, African American.

Howard University.

Ohio State University.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey, Section A2005\_063\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

After returning from his service in World War II in 1946, Robert Dorsey enrolled at Ohio State University, where he received his B.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1949. While at OSU, Dorsey met his wife-to-be, Helena Harris, and they married in October of 1949. After graduating from college, Dorsey accepted a position as an engineer at General Electric, and spent most of 1949 and 1950 on three-month assignments at plants in Indiana, New York and Massachusetts. In 1951, Dorsey chose to return to Ohio to join GE's Greater Cincinnati facility, where he began working in the newly-established jet engine manufacturing division. Dorsey describes GE's focus on increasing minority recruitment during the 1940s and 1950s, and their engineering advancements over the years.

Ohio State University.

Marriage.

General Electric Company.

Engineering.

Jet engines.

Minorities in engineering.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey, Section A2005\_063\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:18 ?

Robert Dorsey spent thirty-eight years at General Electric Company's Aircraft Engine Division in the Cincinnati suburb of Evendale, Ohio. When he began his career at the Cincinnati location in 1951, Dorsey was the first African American engineer at the plant. He and his wife, Helena Harris, established their roots in Cincinnati, where they raised three daughters. Dorsey's proudest contributions at GE were his involvement in transitioning his unit into the information systems processing age, and his work on developing computer simulation models for use in aircraft maintenance processes. Over the course of his career at GE, Dorsey witnessed GE's rapid advancement in the manufacture of jet engines that were used to power military as well as commercial aircraft.

General Electric Company.

Jet engines.

Engineering.

Computer simulation.

Cincinnati (Ohio).

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Sherwood Dorsey, Section A2005\_063\_001\_005, TRT: 0:24:41 ?

Robert Dorsey retired from General Electric (GE) in 1988, following a thirty-eight year career as an engineer in the Aircraft Engine Division. Since his retirement, Dorsey has remained employed as a technical network support specialist at H&R Block, and as an engineering consultant at Belcan Engineering, a firm that works closely with GE. Dorsey reflects upon his legacy, the future of engineering, and the state of race-relations in America. He also describes his photographs.

General Electric Company.

Retirement.

Belcan Corporation.

Race relations.

Reminiscing.