

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vera Thelma Shorter

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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>	Shorter, Vera T., 1922-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vera Thelma Shorter,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 24, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:25).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Community activist Vera Thelma Shorter (1922 - 2021) was the first African American to serve as the supervisor of tax auditors and the equal employment opportunity officer for the IRS in New York. In addition to her work with the IRS, Shorter was an active member of Martha's Vineyard's black community. Shorter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 24, 2005, in Tisbury, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_151
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Auditor, community activist, and writer, Vera T. Shorter, was born on December 22, 1922, in Huntington, New York. Raised in Huntington on the Long Island section of New York, Shorter and her family moved to nearby Northport when she entered high school in 1936. After graduating from Northport High School in 1940, Shorter studied bookkeeping at Eastman Business School in New York City. After several years as a secretary and bookkeeper, Shorter earned a certificate in accounting from Pace College in Brooklyn, New York. During her early career as an accountant, Shorter was an active member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and an activist with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Shorter was also a contributing writer to *Black Odyssey*, a travel and leisure magazine, and *Our World*, writing feature articles in the Fairs and Food section.

Between 1965 and 1973, Shorter served as the supervisor of tax auditors at the Internal Revenue Service headquarters in Manhattan. During her last three years at the IRS (1973-1976), Shorter was the equal employment opportunity officer; she was the first African American to attain these positions with the IRS in New York.

In 1976, Shorter moved to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts when her husband, Rufus B. Shorter (1920-1980), was appointed superintendent of the Martha's Vineyard Public Schools. After the move to Martha's Vineyard, Shorter became an influential and respected civic and community leader, becoming involved in virtually every aspect of the black community and in a range of educational and civic activities in the larger community. For ten years, Shorter coordinated a celebrity tennis tournament to raise money for the Nathan Mayhew Seminars, an adult education institution. Shorter served on the executive committee of the Martha's Vineyard branch of the NAACP, and as a member of the Affirmative Action Advisory Committee to the Vineyard schools. Shorter also served as the president of the Lagoon Pond Association and was a charter member of the Island's branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. For many years Shorter also assisted the elderly in preparing

their income tax returns.

Shorter passed away on February 26, 2021.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vera Thelma Shorter was conducted by Robert Hayden on June 24, 2005, in Tisbury, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community activist Vera Thelma Shorter (1922 - 2021) was the first African American to serve as the supervisor of tax auditors and the equal employment opportunity officer for the IRS in New York. In addition to her work with the IRS, Shorter was an active member of Martha's Vineyard's black community.

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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:

Shorter, Vera T., 1922-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Shorter, Vera T., 1922---Interviews

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African American women civic leaders--Interviews

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Auditors--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:

Community Activist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Vera Thelma Shorter, June 24, 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 Vera Thelma Shorter, Section A2005\_151\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Vera Thelma Shorter was born on December 22, 1922 in Huntington, New York to Susan Hendrickson Groves and Claude Groves. Her maternal grandmother, Minnie Allen Hendrickson, left Virginia to join her sisters in New York. Her maternal grandfather, Benjamin Hendrickson, was a chauffeur who had served as a cook in the Spanish American War. Shorter recalls her grandparents' strict discipline. Shorter's mother, a talented piano player, was born and raised in Huntington, and worked as a nanny and on the staff of the Rockefeller family estate in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Shorter's father was born in 1889, and raised in Brooklyn, New York. A mechanical engineer by training, he worked several jobs before finding a position as a foreman at a factory. Shorter recalls her father's flair for storytelling and visiting New York City with him and her siblings. Her older brother, Eugene Groves, was a musician and food administrator, and her sister, Marie Groves, worked for the State of New York. African American women civic leaders--Interviews.

Auditors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Vera Thelma Shorter, Section A2005\_151\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Vera Thelma Shorter's maternal grandfather's mother, Susan January, was Shinnecock Native American and married a man of Portuguese descent. Shorter's maternal grandmother, Minnie Allen Hendrickson, moved from Farmville, Virginia to Huntington, New York, following her employers' undue advances. Shorter's paternal grandmother, Cora, was born in Ridgeville, Pennsylvania, worked as a ladies' maid and traveled to France. Shorter was raised in a predominately white neighborhood in Huntington, where she could smell the nearby ocean and hear the sounds of fog horns and boats. She remembers almost being hit by a truck at the age of three and attending Methodist church with her family. She also recalls a lesson from her history teacher in elementary school about diversity and inclusion. When Shorter's family moved to Northport, New York, she attended Northport High School, where she captained the soccer team, and was also an avid writer and dancer. She recalls her part-time job as a baby sitter and her college plans.

Video Oral History Interview with Vera Thelma Shorter, Section A2005\_151\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Vera Thelma Shorter graduated from Northport High School in 1940. She attended night school to study bookkeeping at Eastman Business School in Poughkeepsie, New York, while working as an au pair and office assistant at a physician's office in Brooklyn. During the World War II era, Shorter co-founded the citywide youth committee. She recalls how the group picketed businesses to protest discrimination and meeting First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She met and married Rufus Shorter in 1943. During the early years of their marriage, her husband served in the U.S. military, while she worked as a secretary, bookkeeper and raised their first child. Shorter describes her husband's rise as an educator in the New York City Board of Education. Between 1965 and 1973, she served as the supervisor of tax auditors at the Manhattan District of the Internal Revenue Service before being promoted to equal employment opportunity officer. Shorter was among the first African Americans to attain these positions with the IRS in New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Vera Thelma Shorter, Section A2005\_151\_001\_004, TRT:

0:29:47 ?

Vera Thelma Shorter served as the equal employment opportunity officer for the Manhattan District of the IRS from 1973 to 1976. She recounts challenging situations she defused at the IRS. Shorter was president of the Parent Teacher Association for her daughters' school. She was also a member of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and the NAACP. She wrote for the travel and leisure magazine 'Black Odyssey,' and for the Fairs and Food section of 'Our World.' In 1976, she moved to Martha's Vineyard when her husband, Rufus Shorter, was appointed superintendent of the island's public schools. After the move, Shorter became an influential and respected civic and community leader. She coordinated a celebrity tennis tournament to raise money for the Nathan Mayhew Seminars, an adult education institution, and joined its board. She also served on the executive committee of the local NAACP and as president of the Lagoon Pond Association. She has two daughters, Lynn Shorter and Beth Shorter-Bagot.

Video Oral History Interview with Vera Thelma Shorter, Section A2005\_151\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Vera Thelma Shorter's husband, Rufus Shorter, served as the superintendent of schools on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts from 1976 until his death in 1980. For her husband's work in developing a comprehensive education system, the local high school paid tribute to him by naming its extension the Rufus B. Shorter Wing. Shorter recalls the impact of his death and her decision to continue living on The Vineyard. Shorter describes her accounting business, which provided tax consultation services to clients on Martha's Vineyard. She recalls the modeling agency that she almost started in New York City. Shorter has one grandson, Gabriel Bagot, who visits her from France during the summers. In this part of the interview, Shorter learns about The HistoryMakers' Digital Archive. She also offers advice to young people interested in community activism and reflects upon her life, how she hopes to be remembered and her concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.