

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorothy Terrell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Terrell, Dorothy, 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell,
Dates:	April 11, 2007 and March 9, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2017
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:48:34).
Abstract:	Corporate executive Dorothy Terrell (1945 -) was the former president of Sun Microsystems's Sun-Express. Terrell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 11, 2007 and March 9, 2017, in Boston, Massachusetts and Miami Beach, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_133
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive Dorothy Ann Terrell was born June 12, 1945 in Hallandale, Florida. Her parents, Pearlle Weeks Terrell and Charles Walter Terrell, sent her to Lanier Elementary School, Lanier Junior High School, and Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale. Aspiring to be a journalist, Terrell graduated from high school in 1963 and enrolled at Florida A&M University. Terrell graduated cum laude from Florida A&M University in 1966 with her B.A. degree in English.

After accepting a counseling position with Job Corps, Terrell moved to Poland Springs, Maine. In 1967, Terrell moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where she worked as a counselor for Reverend Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrial Corporation (OIC), and eventually rose to the position of assistant director. In 1973, Terrell joined the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office for Children, where she became the associate director in 1975. Serving on the advisory board of OIC brought Terrell into contact with representatives of the Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), who offered her a job as a training manager in 1976. From 1978 to 1980, Terrell was plant human relations manager in Westminister, Massachusetts. She later became group human relations manager of systems manufacturing from 1980 to 1983 and, from 1983 to 1984, served as group manager for engineering and manufacturing. In 1984, Terrell was promoted to plant manager of the DEC plant in Roxbury, Massachusetts. She was the first African American woman to hold this position. Primarily manufacturing keyboards, Terrell reduced the new product cycle from ninety days to seventy-five days and reduced manufacturing costs by more than 30%. Terrell also served as DEC's group manager of interconnect/packaging from 1987 to 1991. Terrell joined Sun Microsystems, Inc. in 1991 as president of Sun-Express, and as a corporate officer through 1997. At Sun Microsystems, she led the company in asset management performance and grew revenues to over \$300 million per year. After 1997, Terrell was served simultaneously as senior vice president of worldwide sales for NMS Communications and president of Platform Services Group. Terrell temporarily left First Light Capital as a partner and became president and CEO of Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC), a national nonprofit organization that promotes economic prosperity in America's inner cities through private sector engagement with local residents. Terrell later returned to work for First Light Capital.

Terrell has been the recipient of many awards, including being named one of the Top 50 line managers in America by *Executive Female* magazine, a Top Ten Business Marketer by *Business Marketing* magazine, and one of 20 Women of Power and Influence by *Black Enterprise* magazine. She also received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Florida A&M University. Terrell was a subject in *The Wizards and Their Wonders: Portraits in Computing*, an exhibit and book by Christopher Morgan, as well as *The Enterprising Woman* by Mari Florence.

Terrell lives in Miami Beach, Florida.

Dorothy Terrell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 11, 2007 and March 9, 2017.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorothy Terrell was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on April 11, 2007 and March 9, 2017, in Boston, Massachusetts and Miami Beach, Florida, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Corporate executive Dorothy Terrell (1945 -) was the former president of Sun Microsystem's Sun-Express.

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:

Terrell, Dorothy, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Terrell, Dorothy, 1945- --Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

Women in technology--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Corporate Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Dorothy Terrell, April 11, 2007 and March 9, 2017. 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 Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_001_001, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

Dorothy Terrell was born on June 12, 1945 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida to Pearl Weeks Terrell and Charles Terrell, Sr. Her maternal great-grandparents were part Native American, and lived on a reservation in Florida. Her maternal grandfather was a gardener, and her grandmother worked as a domestic. They moved to Hallandale Beach, Florida, where Terrell's mother attended Dillard High School nearby in Fort Lauderdale. Terrell's paternal grandfather was an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) minister, and her father was a deacon at Greater Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as the first African American deputy sheriff in Broward County, Florida. He received an honorary degree from Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida, an A.M.E. institution. Terrell describes her parents' personalities and how she takes after her mother. She also remembers visiting her father's family in Aucilla; attending church; and the segregation of Hallandale Beach from the all-white Hollywood, Florida.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Women in technology--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_001_002, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Dorothy Terrell's parents married, and moved to Detroit, Michigan. Becoming homesick after a year, they returned to Hallandale, Florida, an African American community outside Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Terrell's parents had four biological children, and adopted both their grandchild, Kevin Terrell, and Terrell's friend, Eugenia Nicholas. Terrell and her family attended the Greater Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Hallandale, where she competed in oratorical contests. Terrell began her education at Lanier Elementary School, and went on to Lanier Junior High School in Hallandale. She did not watch television much, focusing instead on her studies. Terrell commuted to Fort Lauderdale to attend Dillard High School, where she wrote for the school paper, and wanted to become a journalist. Terrell excelled academically, and graduated salutatorian. She remembers the close-knit community in Hallandale; climbing seagrape trees; and playing cowboys and Indians with the neighborhood boys.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_001_003, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

Dorothy Terrell's older brother was the valedictorian of Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and became a teacher. Although successful in these regards, he became involved with drugs and theft. Graduating from Dillard High School herself in 1963, Terrell enrolled at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida, where she studied English and journalism,

and became more independent. She pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and remembers her Spanish teacher; the Marching 100 band; and Olympic runner Bob Hayes. In college, Terrell participated in sit-ins with Bernard Kinsey and Shirley Kinsey that desegregated downtown Tallahassee. She remembers her community's reactions to the March on Washington, and the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Terrell graduated from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University as a member of the White and Gold Honor Society. Unsure of what career to pursue, Terrell accepted a position at a Job Corps center in Maine.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_001_004, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Dorothy Terrell moved to Poland, Maine to work as a counselor at a Job Corps center for women. Having never left Florida before, she was surprised by the culture and weather of the North. After a year, Terrell moved to Boston, Massachusetts, and worked for the Opportunities Industrialization Centers as a counselor, and later a counseling supervisor. She then worked for the Massachusetts Office for Children, revising childcare laws and licensing private childcare agencies. Ready to move on from social work, Terrell was hired as the training manager at the Digital Equipment Corporation's plant in Westminister, Massachusetts, and was quickly promoted to group personnel manager, overseeing several plants. However, with the arrival of a new group manager, Terrell was removed from her position, and consulted Pacific Management Systems in California about what to do next. She accepted a line job in engineering within the Digital Equipment Corporation; and, in 1984, became the manager of the Roxbury plant in Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_001_005, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Dorothy Terrell met her husband, Albert Brown, during her adopted sister's graduation from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida, but they were not married until years later, after both had married and divorced. They had one daughter, Dorian Brown, and a niece, Tammy Terrell, whom they adopted. At work, Terrell ran the Digital Equipment Corporation's plant in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, where she developed a team based production system after noticing employees' frustration with inefficient production. Within their teams, employees chose project leaders, and developed production processes that employed the team members' strengths. Then, Terrell was asked to establish a new Digital Equipment Corporation plant in Cupertino, California. After she was forced to make major layoffs at the Cupertino plant, Terrell left Digital Equipment Corporation to work for SunExpress, the direct marketing division of Sun Microsystems, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_006, TRT: 6:29:48 ?

Dorothy Terrell grew up in a predominately black neighborhood of Hallandale Beach, Florida. There, her father, Charles Terrell, Sr., worked as a gardener and deputy sheriff, owned apartment buildings and served as a deacon at the Greater Ward Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which the family attended regularly. Terrell grew up on the same block as her maternal grandparents, Jane Griffin Weeks and Joe Weeks, and her childhood friend, Vianna Hayes; and she played freely in the area with her brothers Charles Terrell, Sr. and Levon Terrell, and her nephew Kevin Terrell, who was raised with the family. Terrell's parents were strict disciplinarians, but they also encouraged her to question authority. She attended Lanier Elementary School and Lanier Junior High School in Hallandale Beach, before enrolling at Dillard High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which her parents considered a stronger school than the local Attucks School in Hollywood, Florida. She recalls meeting Cecil Hayes as a teenager.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_007, TRT: 7:35:43 ?

Dorothy Terrell enrolled at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida in 1963, where she studied English and journalism. During this time, she lived with interior designer Cecil Hayes, and met Eugenia Nicholas, whom her parents subsequently adopted. After graduating in 1966, Terrell and Nicholas joined the Job Corps in Poland Spring, Maine, where they provided counseling and vocational training to young women from inner cities. In 1967, the pair moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where they met community leaders Melvin King and Elma Lewis. There, Terrell joined the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), a program organized by Dr. Leon Sullivan and Gary Robinson to train and place adults in the technology industry. Terrell started as a counselor, but was soon promoted to director of training, working closely with industry leaders. She then worked at the Massachusetts Office for Children, before she was recruited by Paul Newman to join the Digital Equipment Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_008, TRT: 8:37:23 ?

Dorothy Terrell joined the Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), where she quickly became the employee relations manager and then the personnel manager at the company's largest plant, in Westminister, Massachusetts. At the time, DEC and its competitors in the Boston area focused on implementing affirmative action measures; and as a result, the company formed core groups by race and gender for employees to discuss the work environment. Terrell excelled in her leadership and team-building abilities, in spite of her limited background in the STEM fields. She became the group personnel manager over several plants; and in 1984, Ralph Gillespie offered her his position as manager of the company's plant in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, making her DEC's first plant manager without a STEM background. During her time there, she led the plant to produce its millionth keyboard, and reduced the product cycle from ninety to seventy-five days by shifting production from a simple assembly line to a team-based model.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_009, TRT: 9:30:32 ?

Dorothy Terrell led the Digital Equipment Corporation's (DEC) Roxbury plant in Boston, Massachusetts, to transition to just-in-time manufacturing, through her use of team-based rather than line-based manufacturing. Terrell's first daughter, Dorian Brown, was born in 1987, at which point Terrell left the plant to Harold Epps to take a strategic position at the company's offices in Maynard, Massachusetts. In 1989, Terrell was offered the position of plant manager for DEC's most technically advanced plant, in Cupertino, California. She accepted the offer, and moved with her family to Saratoga, California. Under her leadership, the plant weathered an earthquake, and brought the VAX 9000 supercomputer into commercial production. However, the VAX 9000 did not sell, and DEC had failed to invest in personal computers, so the company was forced to lay off many of its Cupertino employees in 1990. Terrell returned to Boston, and left DEC to join businessman Scott McNealy at Sun Microsystems, Inc. in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_010, TRT: 10:34:46 ?

Dorothy Terrell was recruited by CEO Scott McNealy to serve as president of SunExpress, a new aftermarketing division of Sun Microsystems, Inc. While her family was initially reluctant to leave California, they joined her in Boston, Massachusetts a year later. To build SunExpress, Terrell hired Bob Cirrone as the CFO, and Genelle Trader as the vice president of marketing. Together, they created a model to reach customers and handle orders, which differed from that

of a traditional corporate sales team. They built an online catalogue called Sun Plaza, developed a finance system to collect bills rapidly and shipped products on demand. Soon, SunExpress expanded to Japan and throughout Western Europe, via a call center in Holland. The company grew rapidly, becoming profitable in eighteen months and earning \$300 million in annual sales with a staff of only 300 people. In spite of their success, they faced competition and infighting from other divisions of Sun Microsystems.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_011, TRT: 11:32:48 ?

Dorothy Terrell hired Genelle Trader and Gerald Walker, the two most senior African American executives at Sun Microsystems, Inc. apart from herself. She also worked briefly with business leader Carol Bartz. With the support of her husband Albert Brown and their long-time nanny, Terrell was able to care for her daughter Dorian Brown and niece Tammy Terrell while sustaining her career. In 1994, Terrell became a board member at General Mills Inc., where she served on every committee of the board. She later joined the board of directors at Herman Miller, Inc. and the Sears, Roebuck and Co. In these roles, she was often the only African American woman in the room, but she worked to bring more women and people of color onto corporate boards. In 1997, having grown increasingly frustrated with internal competition and limits to her personal growth, Terrell left SunExpress to join NMS Communications Corporation. At this point in the interview, Terrell reflects upon her success as a corporate leader.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_012, TRT: 12:32:16 ?

Dorothy Terrell joined the telecommunications startup NMS Communications Corporation in Framingham, Massachusetts, at the invitation of CEO Robert P. Schechter. Although she was initially interested in working for a larger services business, she acquiesced the position when the scope of her responsibilities was broadened to include manufacturing, information technology, human resources and supply chain. The company grew slowly, and suffered from organizational challenges. In 2008, Terrell went to work for the nonprofit Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC), which sought to attract businesses to inner city environments. Around this time, Terrell's husband, Albert Brown, became severely ill, prompting her departure from the ICIC. After his death in 2011, Terrell then moved to Miami, Florida, where she joined the board of the Perez Art Museum Miami. She also purchased a home in Newport, Rhode Island. Additionally, Terrell talks about Corporate America's position in the global economy.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section A2007_133_002_013, TRT: 13:27:38 ?

Dorothy Terrell became more politically involved in 2007 through her early support of Massachusetts Governor Deval L. Patrick. Prior to that, she joined Boston 2004, Incorporated, the committee to fund the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston, Massachusetts. Inspired by then-Senator Barack Obama's speech at that convention, Terrell became one of the first supporters of the Democratic Hope Fund to support his 2008 presidential campaign. She subsequently contributed to the campaign funds of Kamala Harris and Andrew Gillum. In Miami, Florida, Terrell supported programs to broaden the cultural horizons of inner city youth, including the Robert Battle's dance program, AileyCamp, and The SEED School of Miami, a boarding school for at risk youth. Terrell reflects upon her legacy, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Terrell, Section

A2007_133_Terrell_Dorothy_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:02:36 ?

In honor of BusinessMakers: Breakout Leaders, we salute Dorothy Terrell, former President and CEO of Sun Express, who speaks about internet commerce, her career, and the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City.