

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nichelle Nichols

PERSON

Nichols, Nichelle

**Alternative Names:** Nichelle Nichols;

**Life Dates:** December 28, 1932-July 30, 2022

**Place of Birth:** Robbins, Illinois, USA

**Residence:** Woodland Hills, CA

**Occupations:** Actress;

## Biographical Note

Actress Nichelle Nichols was born on December 28, 1932 in Robbins, Illinois near Chicago. Her father, Samuel Earl Nichols, was a factory worker who also served as the mayor of Robbins and as its chief magistrate. Her mother, Lishia Mae (Parks) Nichols, was a homemaker. As a child, Nichols' family moved to Chicago where she studied dance at the Chicago Ballet.

During the late 1940s, Nichols was discovered by jazz legend Duke Ellington and toured with both Ellington and Lionel Hampton as a lead singer and dancer. Her acting career began in the film *Porgy and Bess* (1959); and her first television role was on "The Lieutenant" (1964). Nichols went on to record two albums, including "Down to Earth" (1968), and "Out of This World" (1991).

In 1966, Nichols was cast as Lieutenant Commander Uhura in *Star Trek*, which marked one of the first times that an African American actress was portrayed in a non-stereotypical role on television. Nichols went on to appear as Uhura numerous times in the *Star Trek* movie and television series, including *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986), , *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, Paramount (1989), *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991). She was also cast as Ruana in two Tarzan films: *Tarzan's Jungle Rebellion* (1967) and *Tarzan's Deadly Silence* (1970).

In 1975, Nichols established Women in Motion, Inc., a company that produced educational materials using music as a teaching tool and was expanded to become an astronaut recruitment tool after Nichols won a grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). This resulted in thousands of women and minorities

applying to NASA's space program such as Sally Ride, Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, and Ellison Onizuka. In addition to her autobiography, *Beyond Uhura: Star Trek and Other Memories* (1994), Nichols is co-author of *Saturn's Child* (1995) and a contributor to publications of the National Space Institute.

In October of 1984, Nichols was presented with NASA's Public Service Award for her many efforts towards integrating the U.S. space program. She was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1992, and became the first African American actress to place her handprints in front of Hollywood's Grauman's Chinese Theatre, along with the rest of the *Star Trek* cast. Nichols was elected an honorary member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.; and, on June 8, 2010, she received an honorary doctorate degree from Los Angeles Mission College.

Nichelle Nichols was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on December 17, 2013.

Nichols passed away on July 30, 2022 at the age of 89.

## Related Entries

**Englewood High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

[STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Betsy Ross Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1963 to 1964]

**The Lieutenant**

**Paramount Pictures, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1966 to 1969]

**Lt. Cmd. Uhura, "Star Trek" Television Series**

**Paramount Pictures, Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1971 to 1991]

**Star Trek Film Series**

**National Space Society** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**National Advisory Council Member**

**Sammy Dyer School of the Theater** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Student**

**The Chicago School of Ballet** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1950 to 1956]

**Student**

**Kwanza Foundation** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1973 to ?]

**Board of Governors**

**Women in Motion, Inc.** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1975 to ?]

**Founder & Executive Director**