

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wanda Austin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Austin, Wanda Murry, 1954-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin,
Dates:	April 25, 2011 and February 5, 2019
Bulk Dates:	2011 and 2019
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:47:27).
Abstract:	Aeronautical engineer and academic administrator Wanda Austin (1954 -) served for eight years as president and CEO of The Aerospace Corporation and was named the first African American female interim president of the University of Southern California in 2018. Austin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2011 and February 5, 2019, in El Segundo, California and Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2011_035
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Aeronautical engineer and academic administrator Wanda Austin was born on September 8, 1954 in New York, New York to Helen and Murry Pompey. She graduated from The Bronx High School of Science in 1971, and received a scholarship to attend Franklin and Marshall College, where she earned her B.S. degree in mathematics in 1975. She later received her M.S. degree in systems engineering and mathematics from the University of Pittsburgh in 1977, and her Ph.D. degree in systems engineering from the University of Southern California in 1988.

In 1977, Austin accepted a position at Rockwell International in California working with missile systems. Two years later, she joined The Aerospace Corporation, where she served as a member of the technical staff for seventeen years. In 1996, she was promoted to general manager of the electronic systems division, and was then named general manager of the Military Satellite Communications (MILSATCOM) Division. After three years, she became senior vice president of the engineering and technology group; and, in 2004, Austin became senior vice president of the national system group based in Chantilly, Virginia. In 2008, she was transferred back to California and was named the first female and first African American CEO of The Aerospace Corporation. For eight years, Austin led the organization's 3,600 employees and managed annual revenues of \$950 million at seventeen offices nationwide. Austin retired from her position in 2016, and published her book *Making Space: Strategic Leadership for a Complex World*. Two years later, Austin was named the first African American female interim president of the University of Southern California.

Austin received numerous awards including the Women of the Year award and the Robert H. Herndon Black Image Award from The Aerospace Group. In 2002, she was named a fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Austin was also inducted into the Women in Technology International Hall of Fame in 2007, and received the Black Engineer of the Year Award in 2009. The following year, Austin received the

American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics' von Braun Award for Excellence in Space Program Management. She was later honored with the Horatio Alger Award and the NDIA Peter B. Teets Industry Award in 2012, and was awarded the USC Presidential Medallion in 2018.

In addition to these honors, Austin was selected to serve on President Obama's Review of Human Spaceflight Plans Committee in 2009, and the Defense Science Board in 2010. That same year, she was elected to the USC Board of Trustees. In 2014, Austin was appointed to the NASA Advisory Council; and, the following year, was appointed to serve on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Austin also serves on the board of directors for Chevron and Amgen.

Austin and her husband, Wade Austin, Jr., have two adult sons.

Wanda Austin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 25, 2011 and February 5, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wanda Austin was conducted by Harriette Cole and Larry Crowe on April 25, 2011 and February 5, 2019, in El Segundo, California and Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Aeronautical engineer and academic administrator Wanda Austin (1954 -) served for eight years as president and CEO of The Aerospace Corporation and was named the first African American female interim president of the University of Southern California in 2018.

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:

Austin, Wanda Murry, 1954-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Austin, Wanda Murry, 1954- --Interviews

African American scientists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Aeronautical Engineer

Chief Executive Officer

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|ScienceMakers

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 Wanda Austin, April 25, 2011 and February 5, 2019. 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 Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_001, TRT: 1:29:40 ?

Wanda Austin begins by talking about her family background. Her mother, Hellen McCallum Lewis Pompey was born in South Carolina and raised in Newark, New Jersey. She became a registered nurse after completing her education. Austin's father, Murry Pompey, ran a barber shop in the Bronx where Austin grew up. She describes her childhood in her Bronx neighborhood as well as her experience in elementary school. Austin attended a local elementary school called PS 132 and later bussed to a better school in a Jewish neighborhood called PS46. She participated in the Girl Scouts and various church activities because her mother stressed involvement outside of school. Austin first became interested in mathematics in junior high school.

School integration--New York (State)--New York.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

African American girls--Childhood and youth--New York (State)--New York.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_002, TRT: 2:29:36 ?

Wanda Austin talks about her accelerated, two-year program at Hoffman Junior High School and her experience at Bronx High School of Science where she began her studies in 1967. Austin's family paid close attention to civil rights events such as the deaths of John F. Kennedy in 1963, Malcom X in 1965, and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Due to an experience butting heads with her literature teacher, Austin decided to pursue mathematics, which is more concrete. She went to Franklin and Marshall College where she graduated with her B.S. degree in mathematics in 1975. After a brief stint working towards a teaching certificate, Austin decided to go to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh where she earned her M.S. in both mathematics and engineering in 1977. Her work in applied mathematics involved modeling traffic systems.

Civil rights movements.

Franklin and Marshall College--Students.

University of Pittsburgh--Students.

Mathematics--Study and teaching (Higher).

African American students--Education (Higher)--Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_003, TRT: 3:31:27 ?

Wanda Austin earned her M.S. degrees in mathematics and engineering in 1977 before going to work at Rockwell International for eighteen months. In 1979 she left Rockwell to go to the Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo, California where she worked on a number of projects in the satellite communications and defense arena. During that time she was juggling her family (husband and two sons), work, and further studies, which she pursued at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Austin earned her Ph.D. degree in 1988 and her dissertation was called, "Understanding Natural Language in the Application of System Dynamics Modeling." Austin explains her work in the MILSAC (Military Satellite Communications) Program at Aerospace Corporation and talks about how the Cold War affected the satellite business and space technology.

Cold War.

Aerospace Corporation.

Mathematics--Study and teaching (Higher).

Aerospace engineers.

Aeronautical engineers.

Rockwell International.

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_004, TRT: 4:28:50 ?

Wanda Austin talks about her promotions within the Aerospace Corporation. In July 2001, she became senior vice president of the Engineering and Technology group. Austin was appointed senior vice president of Special Studies in 2004, which involved work with the intelligence community and Reconnaissance Office. From 2004 to 2008, she served as senior vice president of Aerospace's National Systems Group (NSG) after which she became CEO of the company in 2008. Austin talks about her hopes for the future of Aerospace Corporation and reflects on her life's accomplishments by discussing her legacy. In 2009, Austin served on President Barack Obama's Augustine Commission which sought to examine and review human space flight plans for the future.

Women chief executive officers.

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Aerospace engineers.

Aerospace Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_005, TRT: 5:10:52 ?

Wanda Austin talks about what she would have done differently if given the chance. Both of her parents were able to see her earn her Ph.D. degree, and they were proud of her accomplishments. Austin goes on to talk about the challenges of raising her own family and her concerns for the black community. She would like to be remembered as someone who enjoyed life, was engaged in technology and influenced people for the better.

African American families.

African Americans--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_002_006, TRT: 6:27:56 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_002_007, TRT: 7:29:20 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_002_008, TRT: 8:29:10 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_002_009, TRT: 9:10:36 ?