

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Norma Pratt

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Pratt, Norma, 1945-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt,
Dates:	May 21, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:55:39).
Abstract:	Entrepreneur Norma Pratt (1945 -) was the president and CEO of Rodgers Travel, Inc., the oldest African American travel agency in the nation. Pratt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 21, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_132
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Entrepreneur Norma Russell Pratt was born in Indianapolis, Indiana on January 17, 1945 to Mildred Newberry and Fred L. Russell. Pratt's family moved to Philadelphia where she attended West Philadelphia High School, graduating from there in 1962. Pratt then attended Cheyney University, where she graduated with her B.A. in education in 1966. After working as a school teacher, Pratt became a travel agent for Rodgers Travel, Inc., a company that was co-owned by her father. With her father's passing in 1980, Pratt was named President and CEO of Rodgers Travel. In the 1990s, Pratt enrolled her company, which she incorporated years earlier, into the Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) business development program. With infrastructure assistance from the federal program, Pratt was able to secure a \$10 million yearly contract with Scott Air Force Base in St. Clair County, Illinois in 1991, Rodgers' first federal government contract.

Through the SBA 8(a) program, Rodgers won a variety of federal government and municipal contracts from the City of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services, the Department of Defense, as well as several military bases across the country and Lajes Field in Portugal. Under Pratt's leadership, Rodgers Travel, Inc., which has been in business for sixty years, became a multi-million dollar business.

Pratt has been recognized for her leadership of Rodgers Travel, having garnered the Eastern Pennsylvania Minority Small Business Person of the Year award and recognition from publications such as the *Philadelphia Daily News*, *USA Today* and *Black Enterprise*. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and Link, Inc. Pratt lives in the suburban Philadelphia area and has two adult children.

Norma Pratt was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 21, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Norma Pratt was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 21, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Entrepreneur Norma Pratt (1945 -) was the president and CEO of Rodgers Travel, Inc., the oldest African American travel agency in the nation.

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:

Pratt, Norma, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Pratt, Norma, 1945- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Entrepreneur

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 Norma Pratt, May 21, 2012. 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 Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_001, TRT: 1:31:01 ?

Norma Pratt was born on January 17, 1945 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Mildred Newberry Russell and Fred Russell, Jr. Her maternal great-grandmother, Mariah Lester, lived in Hawkinsville, Georgia, where Pratt's great-uncle was lynched in the early 1900s. There, her mother was born to Alice Lester Johnson and Julius Newberry. For high school, she was educated at a Catholic boarding school in Virginia. When Pratt's maternal grandmother remarried to Robert Johnson, the family moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's Eastwick neighborhood. Pratt's paternal great uncle, dentist Guy L. Grant, co-founded Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. Her father's family migrated from Kentucky to Indiana, where he was born in Indianapolis. After graduating from Crispus Attucks High School, he studied at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. During this time, his parents, Estelle Grant Russell and Fred Russell, Sr., relocated to

Miami, Florida, where his father worked as a chauffeur and owned a drug store.

Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_002, TRT: 2:30:33 ?

Norma Pratt's parents, Mildred Newberry Russell and Fred Russell, Jr., met and married in Miami, Florida. They moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where Pratt and her sister, Joanne Russell Ussery, were born. The family later purchased a home in the integrated neighborhood of Southwest Philadelphia in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, Pratt began her education at Henry C. Lea Elementary School and Andrew Hamilton Elementary School. During this time, her mother owned Mildred Russell's Fashions dress shop, and her father worked as a waiter at North Philadelphia Station and at an African American credit bureau. In the early 1960s, Pratt's father obtained a position at Rodgers Travel, Inc., the country's first black travel agency. After a few years, her father became vice president and part owner alongside William Griffin. Pratt describes the history of Rodgers Travel, Inc., which was founded by Dr. C. Harold Rodgers in 1949. She also talks about the racial discrimination faced by African Americans travelers.

Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_003, TRT: 3:29:17 ?

Norma Pratt began her education at the Henry C. Lea Elementary School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when she was only four years old. As the youngest student in her class, Pratt struggled academically, but was encouraged in her studies by her father, Fred Russell, Jr. Pratt then attended Andrew Hamilton Elementary School, and later William L. Sayre Junior High School. She continued her studies at the integrated West Philadelphia High School, where she took typing courses. At sixteen years old, she obtained a cashier position at a supermarket, with her father's assistance. He also completed her college applications on her behalf. After her graduation in 1962, Pratt studied to become a teacher at Cheyney State College in Cheyney, Pennsylvania. She was also active in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority on campus. In 1963, Pratt planned to attend the March on Washington, but was thwarted by her mother, who feared for her safety. Pratt reflects upon her father's legacy as the owner of Rodgers Travel, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_004, TRT: 4:32:50 ?

Norma Pratt married her first husband, basketball coach Kenneth Hamilton, while attending Cheyney State College in Pennsylvania. She graduated with an education degree in 1966, and taught at Edwin M. Stanton Elementary School and Morris E. Leeds Junior High School in the School District of Philadelphia. In 1971, Pratt left teaching to train with her father, Fred Russell, Jr., at Rodgers Travels, Inc.'s Washington, D.C. office. After her father's death in 1980, she managed the agency's office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She also took graduate courses at Philadelphia's Temple University, where she met and married her second husband, Atari co-founder Gregory Pratt. In 1991, Rodgers Travel, Inc. secured a \$10 million account with Scott Air Force Base in Illinois, becoming the first female led minority business to win a government travel contract. After acquiring additional government contracts, the travel agency expanded to eight locations. Pratt describes Rodgers Travel, Inc.'s clientele and leisure business.

Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_005, TRT: 5:29:18 ?

Norma Pratt's clientele base at Rodgers Travel, Inc. included six U.S. Air Force bases, and international accounts for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Through the requirements stipulated in her contracts with the government, Pratt reported on travelling trends of government employees, and enforced government rules and regulations for travel. In addition to government contracts,

Rodgers Travel, Inc. provided leisure travel services, like that of the annual National Black Theatre Festival, ran by Pratt's friend, theater executive Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin. In 2011, Pratt was named the Eastern Pennsylvania Minority Small Business Person of the Year. Pratt describes the continued necessity of travel agencies in the 21st century, and the changes and challenges she witnessed in the travel industry. She also talks about how the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks impacted the airline industry. Pratt then concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon her life.

Video Oral History Interview with Norma Pratt, Section A2012_132_001_006, TRT: 6:22:40 ?

Norma Pratt was the president and owner of Rodgers Travel, Inc., starting in 1980. With her first husband, Kenneth Hamilton, she had one son Askia Hamilton, Sr.; and with her second husband, Gregory Pratt, she had another son, Zeid Pratt, Sr. Pratt reflects upon her legacy and hopes and concerns for the African American community, and then describes how she would like to be remembered. Pratt concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.