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

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Wanda Austin

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin,

Dates: April 25, 2011

Bulk Dates: 2011

Physical Description: 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:08:52).

Abstract: Aeronautical engineer and engineering executive Wanda Austin (1954 - ) worked in satellite communications systems and systems engineering. She began her employment with The Aerospace Corporation in 1979 and has held a number of executive positions throughout her career, culminating with her selection to serve as the president and CEO of The Aerospace Corporation in 2008. Austin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2011, in El Segundo, 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 scientific research company CEO Wanda Austin was born in 1953 in New York City, New York. Growing up in a low-income Bronx neighborhood, Austin’s parents, a barber and a nurse, encouraged her interests, and Austin discovered a love for mathematics. Austin graduated from the Bronx High School of Science in 1971, and she received a scholarship to attend Franklin and Marshall College. She received her B.S. degree in mathematics in 1975. Although she was trained as a high school math teacher and professional in actuarial science, she was not drawn to either career, and so continued her studies at the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned her M.S. degrees in mathematics and systems engineering in 1977. Upon her graduation, Austin became a member of the technical staff in missile systems with Rockwell International for a couple years.

In 1979, Austin began her lengthy career with The Aerospace Corporation, a non-profit research and development center with strong ties to the national security space and communications programs. Within a couple years of her employment, Austin was recognized for her commitment to the community, being named one of five Women of the Year and honored with the Robert H. Herndon Black Image Award. With an Advanced Study Grant from The Aerospace Corporation, and the support of Eberhardt Rechtin, president and CEO of the company, Austin received her Ph.D. degree from the University of Southern California in 1988 while continuing to manage developments within the satellite communication systems for the United States Air Force. Throughout her career, Austin became recognized for her work in satellite and payload system acquisition, systems engineering, and system simulation. In 1991, Austin was promoted to manager of Air Force Satellite Communications Systems. Continuing her work with the Milstar Satellite Program, a system of communications satellites created to provide secure and jam-resistant communications for the United States military, Austin became the general manager of the Electronic Systems Division of The Aerospace Corp. in 1997. Within three years, she was named the senior vice president of Special Studies of the National Systems Group, and in 2008, Austin was unanimously selected
by the Aerospace Corporation board of trustees to become the president and CEO of the organization.

Austin has received much recognition for her work, her leadership, and her outreach efforts to the community. She was named a fellow of the prestigious 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. 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.

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

Wanda Austin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 25, 2011.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wanda Austin was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 25, 2011, inEl Segundo, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Aeronautical engineer and engineering executive Wanda Austin (1954 - ) worked in satellite communications systems and systems engineering. She began her employment with The Aerospace Corporation in 1979 and has held a number of executive positions throughout her career, culminating with her selection to serve as the president and CEO of The Aerospace Corporation in 2008.

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
Crowe, Larry
Hickey, Matthew

**Subjects:**
- African Americans--Interviews
- Austin, Wanda Murry--Interviews
- African American scientists--Interviews

**Organizations:**
- HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)
- The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
- The Aerospace Corp.

**HistoryMakers® Category:**
- ScienceMakers
- 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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/17/2011 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, April 25, 2011

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_001, TRT: 29:21
2011/04/25

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
African American families--Religious life

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_002, TRT: 28:49
2011/04/25

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 [1963], Malcom X [1965], and Martin Luther King Jr. [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 movement
Franklin and Marshall College
University of Pittsburgh

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_003, TRT: 31:07
2011/04/25

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

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_004, TRT: 28:43
2011/04/25

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.

Obama, Barack. Aaron, Hank, 1934-

NASA

Video Oral History Interview with Wanda Austin, Section A2011_035_001_005, TRT: 10:52
2011/04/25

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