

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Renetta Earledeane McCann

---

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	McCann, Renetta, 1956-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 1, 2005 and March 25, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:19:51).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Advertising chief executive Renetta Earledeane McCann (1956 - ) was the CEO of the Americas Starcom MediaVest Group. McCann was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 1, 2005 and March 25, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_079
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Renetta McCann, long time CEO of the Americas Starcom MediaVest Group, was born as Renetta E. Walker on December 8, 1956, in Chicago, Illinois. Raised by her mother, school teacher Editha Lorraine Collymore Walker, and grandmother, Renetta Collymore, McCann attended Holy Cross Elementary School, St. Phillip Neri School, and graduated from Aquinas Dominican High School in 1974. McCann, who excelled in forensics, earned her B.S. degree in Communications from Northwestern University in 1978.

McCann joined Chicago's Leo Burnett advertising agency as a client service trainee in 1978, and rose rapidly to become Burnett's first African American media supervisor the following year; she then became the first African American vice president of the company in 1988, and the first to be media director in 1989. As media director, McCann handled a variety of clients including Sony, Keebler, McDonald's, and Dewar's; she was named senior vice president in 1995. In 1998, McCann was promoted to managing director of Starcom; as Leo Burnett merged with D'Arcy, she became CEO of the Americas Starcom MediaVest Group. McCann was responsible for the operation of the largest office in the Starcom MediaVest Group network, encompassing Canada and the United States, and including Starcom; MediaVest; GM Planworks; and Starlink. Responsible for United States and Latin America, McCann oversaw all annual business plan development and finance issues; maintained client relationships; and drove the agency's strategic planning functions.

McCann developed Starcom into one of the advertising industry's top strategic planning think tanks. The winner of numerous Effies and Cannes Lions, McCann was selected as one of *Ebony* magazine's 57 Most Intriguing Blacks and *Black Enterprise* designated her the 2002 Executive of the Year. McCann was chosen Media Maven by *Advertising Age* in 1991, while the Women's Advertising Club of Chicago selected her as Advertising Woman of the Year for 2002. Profiled by *Business Week* and *Chicago Magazine*, *Essence* named McCann one of 50 Women Who Are Changing The World. In January of 2009, McCann took a sabbatical from her position at the Americas Starcom MediaVest Group, citing a need to spend time with her family and reflect on personal and professional goals.

# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 1, 2005 and March 25, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Advertising chief executive Renetta Earledeane McCann (1956 - ) was the CEO of the Americas Starcom MediaVest Group.

---

# 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:

McCann, Renetta, 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
McCann, Renetta, 1956---Interviews

---

African American businesspeople--Interviews

---

African American women executives--Interviews

---

Advertising executives--Interviews

---

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Advertising Chief 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 Renetta Earleane McCann, June 1, 2005 and March 25, 2005. 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 Renetta Earleane McCann, Section A2005\_079\_001\_001,

TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Renetta Earledeane McCann was born on December 8, 1956 in Chicago, Illinois. McCann's parents' divorced when she was an infant and she never met her father, Joseph Williamson. McCann's mother, Editha Collymore Walker, was born in 1935 in Chicago. She studied at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and then worked as a teacher. McCann's great-grandparents were from Barbados. They moved to Panama to work on the Panama Canal and then to Chicago where their son, McCann's grandfather, met McCann's grandmother who was from Mobile, Alabama. McCann was raised around her maternal family in an intergenerational household in the Woodlawn neighborhood of Chicago until she was eight. In second grade, her mother remarried and McCann moved to the South Shore neighborhood, where she attended St. Philip Neri School, which was her first time at a school where a majority of her classmates were white. McCann graduated from St. Aquinas Dominican High School. She remembers the role of music in her family life.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Advertising executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann, Section A2005\_079\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:21:10 ?

Renetta McCann was a shy, studious girl growing up in South Shore, Chicago, Illinois, where she took ballet and helped her mother, Editha Walker, care for her younger siblings. McCann experienced racism as a child when her white classmates would abandon her to play at the South Shore Country Club, which did not admit African Americans. After McCann's mother moved the family slightly further south, the parish priest at St. Philip Neri School in Chicago tried to reassign her to a different, mostly African American, Catholic school. Her mother refused to allow the priest to force McCann to attend a de facto segregated school. McCann attended Aquinas Dominican High School in Chicago, an all-girls school where she felt the nuns primarily focused on preparing students to be good housewives. She graduated in 1974, ranked fifth in a class of 105. McCann then enrolled at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, which she chose because it was a good school that was not too close to her family home.

Video Oral History Interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann, Section A2005\_079\_002\_003,  
TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Renetta McCann describes race relations in South Shore, Chicago, Illinois, where she lived for most of her youth. McCann remembers being rebuked by a white classmate for drawing Jesus with brown skin, and having the head priest at St. Philip Neri School in Chicago try to force her family to move her to a predominantly African American school. McCann attended Aquinas Dominican High School, where she earned good grades. Her family was not active in the Civil Rights Movement, and McCann does not remember upheaval in her community after the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy. McCann listened to popular radio stations and attended drive-in movies as a teenager, but did not consider herself a huge consumer of mass media. In the fall of 1974, she began college at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where she joined the Delta Sigma Theta sorority. McCann initially studied law, but, as a sophomore, changed her major and entered Northwestern's School of Speech.

Video Oral History Interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann, Section A2005\_079\_002\_004,  
TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Renetta McCann earned a B.A. in communications from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. After graduation she was hired by Leo Burnett Company Inc. to its Client Services Training Program, then worked in the media department. McCann describes her job responsibilities as a media buyer at Leo Burnett, including working with mass media companies to determine how ads can reach a specific class of consumers. McCann describes what it was like to be one of the first African Americans working in media for Leo Burnett, and explains why she chose to work in the general market rather than for an ad firm owned by African Americans. McCann was passed over for a promotion to be a vice president at Leo Burnett in 1986. She eventually became a vice president in the late-1980s, shortly after completing a dense report on the state of network television in a short amount of time. In 1998, Leo Burnett spun off its media department into a new company, Starcom North America, and McCann was named its managing director.

Video Oral History Interview with Renetta Earledeane McCann, Section A2005\_079\_002\_005, TRT: 0:28:31 ?

Renetta McCann explains why, as a corporate leader, she is always focused on the future; and explains the multiple paradoxes within businesses: the status quo versus innovation; profitability versus employee motivation. She also explains how using leverage to finance companies creates wealth and how her role as the managing director for Starcom North America has led her to gain greater understanding of the financial side of corporate decision making. McCann shares her hopes for the African American community; considers those traits that have contributed to her success; and describes her future plans to enter the not-for-profit sector.