

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Patrick R. Gaston

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gaston, Patrick R., 1957-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Patrick R. Gaston,
Dates:	August 30, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:22:36).
Abstract:	Telecommunications executive Patrick R. Gaston (1957 -) was appointed president of the Verizon Foundation in 2003. In 2007, Gaston took on the additional role of independent director and member of the audit committee of Bed Bath & Beyond, Inc. Gaston was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 30, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_212
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Patrick Reginald Gaston was born on August 5, 1957, in Port Au Prince, Haiti. While still a youth, Gaston and his family moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where he remained until he relocated to Montreal, Canada, as a teen to attend boarding school. From Montreal, Gaston went on to the University of Massachusetts, from which he graduated with his B.A. degree in management in 1984; that same year he began work with Verizon. In 1992, Gaston received his M.B.A. degree from Northeastern University. In addition to the degrees he was awarded within the United States, Gaston also earned an international certificate in business from Ecolé Superieure de Commerce in Reims, France. Remaining with Verizon throughout his professional development, Gaston occupied a wide array of management positions, ranging from operations, to marketing, to human resources, to strategic planning and government relations. Eventually, Gaston rose to the position of executive director of Verizon's Strategic Alliances Group, in which he coordinated the company's activities within the community.

Gaston was named the president of the Verizon Foundation in 2003; here he was charged with overseeing the philanthropic activities of the company, including the issuing of grant funding to community development programs. The Verizon Foundation placed special emphasis on the utilization of technology and literacy to improve the quality of community life; to help achieve those aims, Gaston oversaw an annual budget of \$75 million. In 2007, Gaston took on the additional role of independent director and member of the audit committee of Bed Bath & Beyond, Inc.

In addition to his professional activities with Verizon and Bed Bath & Beyond, Gaston is heavily involved with a variety of organizations and foundations, including the NAACP Special Contributions Fund Board of Trustees; America's Charities; the Foundation of the University of West Indies; and the World Institute on Disability. Gaston has also served as a fellow at the Aspen Institute, and a guest lecturer on the topics of public responsibility and philanthropy at a long list of universities that included Rutgers University, and Dartmouth College.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Patrick R. Gaston was conducted by Shawn Wilson on August 30, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Telecommunications executive Patrick R. Gaston (1957 -) was appointed president of the Verizon Foundation in 2003. In 2007, Gaston took on the additional role of independent director and member of the audit committee of Bed Bath & Beyond, Inc.

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:

Gaston, Patrick R., 1957-

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Gaston, Patrick R., 1957- --Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Endowments--Officials and employees--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Verizon

Occupations:

Telecommunications 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 Patrick R. Gaston, August 30, 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 Patrick R. Gaston, Section A2005_212_001_001, TRT: 0:30:50
?

Patrick R. Gaston was born on August 5, 1957 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti to Yvette Mystal Gaston. His mother was one of forty-nine children born to Napoleon Mystal, a farmer in Anse-a-Veau. She grew up on her father's farm and moved to Port-au-Prince as a teenager to live with her half-sister, Philomene Mystal, and work in a factory. Gaston's father was born to Merion Gaston, a moneylender in Port-au-Prince. He attended Catholic schools and received his baccalaureate degree. Gaston's father was involved in politics, and knew Haitian president, Francois Duvalier, before he was elected. His parents met in Port-au-Prince and had four children together. School and family were important, and Gaston strove to be top of his class at Ecole Frere Andre. He remembers celebrating Christmas and Mardi Gras in Haiti and the lack of discussion around the history of slavery. His mother moved to the United States in 1967.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Endowments--Officials and employees--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Patrick R. Gaston, Section A2005_212_001_002, TRT: 0:30:15
?

Patrick R. Gaston's mother moved to Boston in 1965 and worked as a domestic. She sent money home until Gaston and his family joined her in 1967. Gaston's father disliked the factory work he did in the U.S. and struggled to adapt. Gaston was startled by the large city of Boston and the number of white people. He and his sisters learned English to attend school, but when he started acclimating to African American culture, his mother sent him to the boarding school College Laval in Canada. He remembers fighting with his classmates as the only black student there until he became popular. His mother transferred him to College Francais in Montreal, and he returned to graduate from Matignon High School in Cambridge in 1976. He then worked at the Gaebler Children's Center for a year. Finding Northeastern University too expensive, he transferred to Boston State College and worked at The Kendall Company. In 1981, he entered the University of Massachusetts and worked at The Boston Globe. He graduated in 1984.

Video Oral History Interview with Patrick R. Gaston, Section A2005_212_001_003, TRT: 0:29:56
?

Patrick R. Gaston recalls his academics and social life in high school, and his father's decision to split his time between Haiti and the United States. Gaston completed his degree in business at the University of Massachusetts in 1984 and pursued his desire to work in Paris, France with a job at International Weekends. Although he enjoyed living there, he hoped to start a career, so he returned to the United States and was hired by the New England Telephone Company. Although opportunities for minorities were scarce, he worked in several entry-level positions with the support of David Wilson, founder of the Minority Management Association, and Brendon Healy. In 1991, he was promoted to a training position at NYNEX, the company formed from the merger of New England Telephone and New York Telephone Company. Gaston met NYNEX's executive director for government affairs, Suzanne Geyer, while teaching a development course. She later recommended him for a government affairs job in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Patrick R. Gaston, Section A2005_212_001_004, TRT: 0:29:39

?

Patrick R. Gaston served as the strategic alliance director for NYNEX in 1995, and worked in Washington, D.C. with the National Urban League, the NAACP, and other organizations to lobby for the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Gaston recalls his father's death, which occurred while Gaston was on a business trip with Governor Mel Carnahan. In 1997, Gaston was promoted to assistant vice president of operations for long distance in New York, but the position changed when NYNEX merged with Bell Atlantic. Gaston then returned to the strategic alliance division as its executive director, but he did not enjoy the position. During this time, he served on a variety of boards where he was able to use his skills as a strategist. He was then hired to head the Verizon Foundation, following Suzanne Dubose's tenure. Gaston describes the platform on literacy that he brought to the Foundation, and its other platforms, which include arts and culture, domestic violence prevention and workforce development.

Video Oral History Interview with Patrick R. Gaston, Section A2005_212_001_005, TRT: 0:21:56

?

Patrick R. Gaston and his family relocated to New York City for his job as president of the Verizon Foundation. His wife, a human resources professional, supported the move and his work. Gaston spearheaded the company's support for literacy programs, including one in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The foundation also worked on combatting domestic violence. Gaston describes his desire to continue improving communities and shares advice for those who want to work in business or philanthropy. He reflects upon the importance of history and describes his hopes for minority communities. He concludes the tape by narrating his photographs.