

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dennis Terry

---

## 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>	Terry, Dennis, 1944-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 25, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:44:38).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Nonprofit executive and civic leader Dennis Terry (1944 - 2021) co-founded the Mid Bronx Senior Citizens Council, and was a board member of the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporations, an organization that sought to reverse the flight of jobs and business from the South Bronx. Terry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 25, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_303
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive Dennis Leon Terry was born on October 26, 1944 in Smithfield, North Carolina to Daisy Smith Williams and Kelly Terry, Jr. He grew up in the segregated South and experienced racial segregation and the overwhelming presence of the Ku Klux Klan. He attended North Carolina's Lucille Hunter Elementary School and Springfield, Massachusetts' Buckingham Junior High School and Springfield Technical High School.

In 1964, Terry attended Howard University, where he majored in economics, was a member of the Howard University track team and was involved in Howard's work study program. In addition to being active on campus, Terry also volunteered within the community. In 1968, Terry graduated from Howard University with his B.A. degree in economics.

After graduation Terry became the operations manager for the Long Island Lighting Company. In 1971, motivated by the concept of "diverse cultural groups coming together to produce the common good," Terry and others founded the Mid Bronx Senior Citizens Council (MBSCC). The MBSCC was established as an advocacy group for the elderly focusing on the deteriorating areas of New York City's South Bronx community.

In 1972, Terry became the chairman of the New York Urban League's Bronx Borough Board and attended the National Black Political Convention held in Gary, Indiana. From 1976 until 1996, Terry was a board member of the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SoBRO), a company that sought to reverse the flight of jobs and business from the South Bronx. Terry was also a board member of the Bronx Lebanon Hospital from 1981 to 1982. Terry retired to his residence in the Bronx, New York.

Dennis Leon Terry was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 25, 2007.

Terry passed away on March 9, 2021.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dennis Terry was conducted by Adrienne Jones on October 25, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit executive and civic leader Dennis Terry (1944 - 2021) co-founded the Mid Bronx Senior Citizens Council, and was a board member of the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporations, an organization that sought to reverse the flight of jobs and business from the South Bronx.

---

## 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:

Terry, Dennis, 1944-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Terry, Dennis, 1944- --Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Nonprofit Executive

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

---

## 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 Dennis Terry, October 25, 2007. 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 Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Dennis Terry was born on October 26, 1944 in Smithfield, North Carolina to Daisy Smith Williams and Kelly Terry, Jr. Terry's maternal great-grandparents, Polly Raynor Smith and Jacob Smith, were members of two prominent families in Smithfield. Terry's great-grandfather served as his mother's primary caregiver, while her own mother, Julia Smith Jones, worked as a live-in

domestic to support the family during the Great Depression. Terry's paternal grandparents, Hattie Terry and Kelly Terry, Sr., were farmers in Clayton, North Carolina. His father left the farm to become a butcher at the age of fourteen years old. Terry was born in Smithfield; and, at four years old, moved with his family to the segregated Washington Terrace homes in Raleigh, North Carolina. In Raleigh, Terry spent his time watching movies at the Ambassador Theatre and viewing the historical exhibits at the North Carolina State Capitol. During the summers, he visited his paternal grandparents' farm in Clayton.

African American mothers.

Depressions--1929--United States.

African American fathers.

Public housing--United States--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:08 ?

Dennis Terry grew up in the all-black Washington Terrace community of Raleigh, North Carolina. When he was young, he and his neighbors often played with the white children from a nearby housing development; but, once they began school, they were no longer permitted to be friends. Although racially segregated, Washington Terrace was an economically diverse area, where the residents included African American professionals and laborers of all ages. Because the community was self-sufficient, Terry was mostly shielded from southern racism, although he was aware of the Ku Klux Klan. In Raleigh, Terry attended the all-black Lucille Hunter Elementary School, where he participated in the school patrol, glee club and theater group. At twelve years old, Terry moved with his family to the integrated Old Hill neighborhood of Springfield, Massachusetts. There, he attended Elias Brookings Elementary School and Classical Junior High School, where he clashed with his teachers over the lack of challenging course materials.

African American children--North Carolina--Raleigh.

Segregation.

African American students--Education (Elementary).

Public housing--South Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

Dennis Terry attended Buckingham Junior High School and Technical High School in Springfield, Massachusetts. He initially aspired to become an architect; but, after struggling through a calculus course, turned his career interests towards history and political science. During the summers, Terry attended a summer camp operated by the Urban League of Springfield, Inc., and participated in events at Springfield's Dunbar Community Center. He also sang the lead in a doo-wop group with several older friends, until his mother, Daisy Smith Williams, made him quit. After graduating, Terry matriculated at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where his best friend, Frederick Hurst, was already enrolled. Terry studied business, and competed on the track team alongside Ewart Brown, who went on to become the premier of Bermuda. He roomed with Brown and Jerry Guess, both of whom were involved in the campus' civil rights activities, including the occupation of the administration building in 1968.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Illinois--Springfield.

Howard University--Students.

African American children--Illinois--Springfield--Social life and customs.

Student movements--Washington (D.C.).

African American college students--Political activity--Washington (D.C.)--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Dennis Terry worked for the Potomac Electric Power Company during his junior and senior years at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He and several other African American students were hired as engineer assistants in the planning department under Jack R. Templeton. During the summers, he worked as a meter recorder for the Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) in Long Island, New York, where his mother had relocated from Massachusetts. Upon graduating, Terry applied for a managerial position at LILCO, and was placed in the company's management training program by employment director Guy T. Garrett, Jr., a fellow alumnus of Howard University. As a managerial trainee, Terry was assigned to the marketing and sales departments, and attended stockholder meetings in Garrett's place. After completing the program, he was assigned to the sales department as an analyst. While working for the Long Island Lighting Company, Terry lived with his wife, Sandra Terry, in the Bronx, New York, where he was civically active.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Long Island Lighting Company.

College students--Employment--Washington (D.C.)

African Americans--New York (State)--New York--Social conditions--20th century.

National Urban League.

Congress of Racial Equality.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Dennis Terry was active with a number of civic organizations in the Bronx and Brooklyn boroughs of New York City. He painted churches with the Black Panther Party, and served on the board of the Bronx branch of the New York Urban League. Hoping to influence the teacher's strike led by union president Albert Shanker in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn in 1968, Terry campaigned for a seat on the Brooklyn school board, but was not elected. In 1975, the passage of the Social Security Act made public funds available for senior citizen centers. In partnership with Henry J. Lenahan and Lawrence McFarland, Terry used this new funding to form the Mid Bronx Senior Citizens Council, Inc., which provided housing and care, such as meal deliveries, to elderly citizens of the Bronx. The organization operated several housing facilities, including Concourse Plaza, Fannie Lou Hammer and the Andrew Freedman Home. Terry also served on the board of the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation.

Voluntarism--United States.

African American couples.

Older people--Services for--New York (State)--New York.

Community development--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Dennis Terry, Section A2007\_303\_001\_006, TRT: 0:15:28 ?

Dennis Terry attended the National Black Political Convention of 1976 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Inspired by the liberation movements in former European colonies, the convention brought together black power activists from across the United States. During the convention events, Terry was unknowingly filmed for a news segment; and, after being recognized by a colleague from the Long Island Lighting Company, had to deny his participation because of

discrimination in Corporate America. In 2006, Terry was recognized in the Congressional Record for his work in the community of the Bronx, New York. He was also honored by the Citizens Advice Bureau, a civic organization and settlement house based in the Bronx. Terry talks about his plans for the future, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

National Black Political Convention (1972 : Gary, Ind.).

Voluntarism--United States.

African Americans--Politics and government--20th century.