

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Evie Garrett Dennis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dennis, Evie Garrett, 1924-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Evie Garrett Dennis,
Dates:	November 3, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:22:33).
Abstract:	City education administrator and olympics executive Evie Garrett Dennis (1924 -) was the first woman and first person of color to serve as the vice president of the U.S. Olympic Committee. She was also the first woman and first African American superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, where she was instrumental in the desegregation process. Dennis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 3, 2008, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_118
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Evie Garrett Dennis was born on September 8, 1924, in Farmhaven, Mississippi, to Ola and Eugene Garrett. She graduated from Cameron Street High School and received her B.S. degree from St. Louis University in 1953.

Dennis came to Denver, Colorado, as a researcher for the Children's Asthma Research Institute and The Jewish National Home for Asthmatic Children. In 1966, she began her career in public education as a teacher. Dennis was instrumental in convening the first ever convention of The Athletics Congress (now USA Track & Field) in 1980. Since 1983, Dennis has chaired the El Pomar Foundation Awards for Excellence Commission, which recognizes and rewards Colorado nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals that serve their communities with distinction and excellence. She was the Chef de Mission for the United States Olympic Committee for two Pan American Games as well as the 1988 Olympic Games, a first for a woman in Olympics' history. Dennis was one of the first two women to reach the U.S. Olympic Executive Committee and the first to serve as Vice President of the U.S. Olympic Committee. She has chaired its Women's Committee and Diversity Committee and remains a member of the Governing Bodies Council. She has been a staunch advocate and spokesperson for Title IX, ensuring equal access to sports for young women. Dennis served as Deputy Superintendent of the Denver Public School System from 1988 through 1990 and the District Superintendent from 1990 to 1994. She was the first woman and the first African American to head the 60,000-student district. Dennis was charged with implementing and monitoring the U.S. District Court order to desegregate Denver Public Schools. Through her dedication to improve and ensure equal educational opportunities for all students and to work with the community through the difficult issues presented by the court's order, Dennis successfully guided the school system through a complicated and divisive period to create positive alliances between the school district, parents, students, teachers, patrons, and community leaders. She designed and implemented innovative programs to meet the needs of the district's diverse population, including the Education Advisory Councils; the Denver Energy, Engineering and Education Program

(DEEEP); and the American Israel Student Exchange Program. Dennis officially retired from the Denver Public School System in 1994.

Dennis was honored as an inductee to the Sportswomen of Colorado Hall of Fame in 1997. In 1999, she was named Laureate of the Association of National Olympic Committees. In addition, Dennis was inducted into the United States Track and Field Hall of Fame in 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Evie Garrett Dennis was conducted by Denise Gines on November 3, 2008, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. City education administrator and olympics executive Evie Garrett Dennis (1924 -) was the first woman and first person of color to serve as the vice president of the U.S. Olympic Committee. She was also the first woman and first African American superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, where she was instrumental in the desegregation process.

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:

Dennis, Evie Garrett, 1924-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dennis, Evie Garrett, 1924- --Interviews

African American women executives--Interviews

African American women school superintendents--Colorado--Denver--Interviews

Sports executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States Olympic Committee

Occupations:

City Education Administrator

Olympics Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers|SportsMakers

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 Evie Garrett Dennis, November 3, 2008. 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 Evie Garrett Dennis, Section A2008_118_001_001, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Evie Garrett Dennis was born on September 8, 1924 in Farmhaven, Mississippi to Ola Brown Garrett and Eugene Garrett. Both her parents were raised in Farmhaven, where Dennis' father was a minister and lumberman, and owned a small farm with fruit and pecan trees. There, her parents raised nine children, of whom Dennis was the eighth born. Her parents belonged to the Church of God, and encouraged their children to pursue education. When Dennis reached the eighth grade, her family moved to the outskirts of Canton, Mississippi, where her father opened a grocery store. She enrolled at Cameron Street High School, where she enjoyed mathematics and sang at her graduation ceremony. Dennis also worked at her father's grocery store. Her older brother, Robert Garrett drove the local school bus; and, following a road collision, was attacked by the other driver and lost an eye. He went on to attend the Tuskegee Institute, and became George Washington Carver's personal chef.

African American women executives--Interviews.

African American school superintendents--Colorado--Denver--Interviews.

Sports executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Evie Garrett Dennis, Section A2008_118_001_002, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Evie Garrett Dennis moved to her older sister's home in St. Louis, Missouri after their mother's early death. She studied biology for two years at the University of Omaha in Omaha, Nebraska, then returned to St. Louis in 1948 to help integrate Saint Louis University. There, she met Philip Dennis, whom she married in 1950. Upon graduating in 1953, Dennis applied to Meharry Medical College, but opted not to attend medical school after the birth of her daughter. Following her divorce, Dennis worked as a research assistant at Washington University in St. Louis. Then, a coworker invited her to help establish the Children's Asthma Research Institute and Hospital in Denver, Colorado, where Dennis worked for several years before becoming a math and science teacher at Denver's Lake Junior High School. In 1973, she was hired by the Denver Public Schools to implement the U.S. Supreme Court's desegregation mandate. She frequently testified in court, and became the target of an attempted bombing.

Video Oral History Interview with Evie Garrett Dennis, Section A2008_118_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Evie Garrett Dennis earned a master's degree from the University of Colorado, Boulder in 1971, and completed a Ph.D. degree five years later at Nova Southeastern University. After her daughter began competing in track and field, Dennis joined the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), and was nominated for a national office by Yale University track coach Robert Giegengack. In 1978,

Dennis became the first woman and first person of color to serve as vice president of the AAU. She also joined the U.S. Olympic Committee, and received the Congressional Gold Medal for leading a boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Russia. In 1981, Dennis became the vice president of the U.S. Olympic Committee. She served as a chairman for the U.S. Women's Track and Field team, and as a chef de maison at the Pan American Games in Venezuela and Cuba. There, during the 1991 Pan American Games, she was sexually harassed by Cuban President Fidel Castro, who invited her to remain in Cuba as his deputy of education.

Video Oral History Interview with Evie Garrett Dennis, Section A2008_118_001_004, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Evie Garrett Dennis served as a deputy superintendent of the Denver Public Schools in 1988, and was appointed as superintendent the following year. During her four year tenure, she helped establish the Denver School of the Arts, the Denver Energy, Engineering and Education Program and the Denver Center for International Studies. She also collaborated with school board member Omar D. Blair to create the American Israel Student Exchange Program. During this time, Dennis remained involved with the U.S. Olympic Committee and USA Track and Field team, and worked with Donna Lopiano and the Women's Sports Foundation to promote diversity in the Olympic Committee. She attended international competitions in countries like Egypt, Russia, Senegal and Cuba, where she met Cuban President Fidel Castro; as well as both the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, and the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China. Additionally, Dennis talks about her family, including her two grandchildren.

Video Oral History Interview with Evie Garrett Dennis, Section A2008_118_001_005, TRT: 0:24:50 ?

Evie Garrett Dennis served on the board of directors of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, California, which was the first Olympic Games to yield a profit. She also represented the U.S. Olympic Committee at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, and extended the public apology after American athletes acted unprofessionally during the opening ceremonies. As a U.S. Olympic Committee member, she visited the White House on several occasions. Dennis reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and shares a message to future generations. Dennis concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.