



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hazel O'Leary

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## 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>	Hazel O'Leary
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hazel O'Leary,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 15, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:59:29).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Cabinet appointee and university president Hazel O'Leary (1937 - ) was the first African American United States Secretary of Energy and the current president of Fisk University. O'Leary was also the CEO of Blaylock and Partners. O'Leary was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 15, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_090
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Cabinet appointee and president of Fisk University, Hazel Rollins O'Leary was born Hazel Reid on May 17, 1937, in Newport News, Virginia to Dr. Russell Edward Reid and Hazel Palleman. Raised by her stepmother Mattie Ross Reid, O'Leary attended the Urban League's camp in Atwater, Massachusetts every summer where she met Alma Brown and the Delany sisters. O'Leary attended Aberdeen Gardens School in Hampton, Virginia, Booker T. Washington School, John Marshall School and Huntington High School in Newport News, Virginia. O'Leary graduated from the High School of Fine and Performing Arts in Newark, New Jersey in 1955. She then graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Fisk University in 1959, at the cusp of the Civil Rights Movement. Among her teachers were Vivian Henderson, Robert Hayden, and T.S. Courier. O'Leary went on to obtain her J.D. degree from Rutgers University Law School in 1966.

From 1967 to 1969, O'Leary handled organized crime cases while serving as assistant county prosecutor in Essex County, New Jersey. Later, she joined the accounting firm of Coopers & Lybrand. During the administration of President Jimmy Carter, O'Leary acted as assistant administrator of the Federal Energy Commission, general counsel of the Community Services Administration, and an administrator for the Economic Regulatory Commission of the newly-created Department of Energy. In 1981, O'Leary and her husband formed O'Leary and Associates, 1989 to 1993, where she served as executive vice president of Northern States Power in Minnesota.

Nominated by President Bill Clinton in 1993, O'Leary became the seventh United States Secretary of Energy and the first African American woman to serve in that office. As Secretary, O'Leary changed the department's Office of Classification to the Office of Declassification, initiated an aggressive clean-up of surplus plutonium, created an Openness Advisory Panel, and encouraged the Clinton administration to end nuclear testing in the United States. O'Leary established the Samuel P. Massie Chair of Excellence Professorship in Environmental Disciplines

which benefited nine historically black colleges and universities. In 1996, O'Leary resigned and joined Blaylock and Partners, becoming CEO in 2002. In 2004, O'Leary was named President of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

O'Leary served on the boards of Africare, UAL Inc. (parent company of United Airlines), Morehouse College; Alchemix Corporation; AES Corporation; The Center for Democracy; ICF Kaiser; Scottish Re, Ltd.; Nashville Chamber Orchestra; the World Wildlife Fund; Nashville Alliance for Public Education; ITC Holdings, Inc.; and Nashville Business Community for the Arts. O'Leary also received numerous honors for her work. O'Leary was widowed in 1987 and she also has one son, attorney Carl G. Rollins III.

Hazel O'Leary was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 15, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hazel O'Leary was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 15, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. Cabinet appointee and university president Hazel O'Leary (1937 - ) was the first African American United States Secretary of Energy and the current president of Fisk University. O'Leary was also the CEO of Blaylock and Partners.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

O'Leary, Hazel Rollins

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
O'Leary, Hazel Rollins, 1937---Interviews

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African American college presidents--Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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African American government executives--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Dept. of Energy

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Fisk University

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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EducationMakers

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## 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 Hazel O'Leary, March 15, 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 8/24/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The

finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, March 15, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Hazel O'Leary, Section A2007\_090\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:15  
2007/03/15

Hazel O'Leary discusses her family, including her parents, stepmother, and grandparents. O'Leary's father's, Russell Edward Reid, was born in Portsmouth, Virginia. Her paternal grandfather was a freedman of color and her biological mother, Hazel Pallemmon, was born in San Antonio, Texas. O'Leary was raised by her stepmother, not her mother, and tends to refer to her stepmother as her mother. Pallemmon was a nursing student when she met and married O'Leary's father. She came from a family of high achievers. O'Leary describes her as beautiful, brilliant, and outspoken. O'Leary's parents divorced before O'Leary was four years old. Pallemmon later became a doctor and practiced medicine until she died. O'Leary talks about her stepmother, Mattie Reid and her parents, as her maternal step-grandparents. O'Leary describes her paternal grandmother as a firebrand and her paternal grandfather as a survivor.

O'Leary, Hazel Rollins, 1937-

African American families--Virginia--Newport News

Video Oral History Interview with Hazel O'Leary, Section A2007\_090\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:28  
2007/03/15

Hazel O'Leary shares a story about her step-grandmother, Lula, who owned restaurants and a concession stand on the beach. O'Leary describes her earliest childhood memories; various chemical smells from her grandfather's medical office: growing up on the water and loving the ocean; and the community's fear of polio during the summers because no-one knew how polio spread. She recalls life during World War II and the camp for German prisoners of war. Sunday school was important to her family, but church was less emphasized. She examines how church provides a good social structure for children and shares that it is more important to her now. O'Leary talks about the recreational activities of her childhood. She is an avid reader who is particularly fond of poetry and history. O'Leary discusses attending Camp Atwater, an Urban League camp in Massachusetts as a young person as well as her school experiences at Aberdeen Gardens School in Hampton, Virginia.

African American families--Virginia--Newport News

African American children--Virginia--Newport News

World War, 1939-1945--Prisoners and prisons, German

Education (Primary)--Virginia--Newport News

O'Leary, Hazel Rollins, 1937-

Camp Atwater (North Brookfield, Mass.)

Aberdeen Gardens (Hampton, Va.)--Social life and customs

Hampton (Va.)

Video Oral History Interview with Hazel O'Leary, Section A2007\_090\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:50  
2007/03/15

Hazel O'Leary discusses her school experiences and how she attended different schools because her parents felt she would receive a better education in certain places. O'Leary recalls the ill treatment she received from other students because of her fair skin. She would run home to her Grandmother Lula, who made her defend herself as a way to survive. O'Leary never felt her fair skin made her superior because she viewed it as the abuse of African American women. O'Leary talks about systemic self-hatred for African Americans and how it needs to be acknowledged and overcome. O'Leary describes herself as a good student in every subject with the exception of mathematics, which she now understands is the key to critical thinking. O'Leary discusses her experiences at Fisk University and how the strictness of rules encouraged a useful sense of discipline in the students. O'Leary loves having an effect on the young lives at Fisk University.

African American children--Virginia--Newport News

Education (Primary)--Virginia--Newport News

Education (Secondary)--New Jersey--Newark

African Americans--Color--Social aspects

Fisk University

Education (Higher)--Tennessee--Nashville

O'Leary, Hazel Rollins, 1937-

Video Oral History Interview with Hazel O'Leary, Section A2007\_090\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:56  
2007/03/15

Hazel O'Leary discusses Fisk University and emphasizes that the faculty and administration are very involved with the life of the students using Fisk's guiding principles, which are diversity, excellence, teamwork, accountability, integrity, and leadership. O'Leary recalls the first African American president of Fisk University, Charles Johnson, and describes him as fairly aloof from the student body. A lot of the research for Brown v. Board of Education on the psychological harm done by segregation took place at Fisk University under his leadership. O'Leary talks about the people that have spoken at Fisk University including Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Marion Barry, and Diane Nash. O'Leary recalls student involvement during the civil rights movement and a more recent program with Nash and a large number of the Freedom Riders on buses retracing their route, with the riders talking to the students. O'Leary discusses her plan to confer honorary degrees to people important to Fisk University.

Fisk University

Education (Higher)--Tennessee--Nashville

African American college students--political activity--Tennessee--Nashville

Civil rights movements--Tennessee--Nashville