Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Creator: Marcia Cantarella

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella

Dates: April 20, 2007 and July 20, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 8 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:52:59).

Abstract: Academic administrator and corporate executive Marcia Cantarella (1946 - ) started her career with Avon Products, Inc. and then became Executive Director of the National Coalition for Women’s Enterprise. She serves as the Acting Associate Dean for Student Opportunities at Hunter College. Cantarella was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 20, 2007 and July 20, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_152

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Corporate executive and school administrator Marcia Elaine Young Cantarella was born on October 31, 1946, in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Margaret Buckner Young and late civil rights leader Whitney M. Young, Jr. Cantarella attended Bryn Mawr College and graduated with honors in 1968 after earning her B.A. degree in political science. For two years, she audited American Studies and law courses at the University of Iowa before moving to New York City in 1972.

Cantarella began working for Avon Products, Inc. in public affairs as a manager, focusing on minority and women’s affairs and issues of affirmative action. In 1973, she joined the board of directors for the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies and became chair of the Committee for Board and Service Volunteers. A year later, Cantarella joined the Women and Foundations Group, became a member of the Association of Black Foundation Executives and joined the nomination and health maintenance organization committee for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Greater New York. She would remain active in all four organizations until 1980.

In 1976, Cantarella was promoted by Avon Products, Inc. to Director of Public Affairs, where she would remain for four more years. During her tenure, Cantarella revamped the Avon Products Foundation in order to focus on women’s issues and moved the organization past monetary donations to focus on volunteerism. In 1980, she was again promoted by Avon, becoming Director of Special Markets, where she spent two years working with minority markets.

In 1985, Cantarella left Avon Products, Inc. and became a work and family issues consultant. Her major clients included New York University and Catalyst, Inc., an organization that works to further the roles of women in the
In 1988, Cantarella was named Executive Director of the National Coalition for Women’s Enterprise, a women’s self-employment and advocacy organization. In 1989, Cantarella returned to school and in 1996 earned her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in American Studies with a concentration in American Business from New York University.

Cantarella became Director of Academic Enhancement Programs at New York University at the College of Arts and Sciences. In 1999, Cantarella was named Assistant Dean of Princeton University, where she was responsible for the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program. In 2002, Cantarella was named Vice President for Student Affairs at the Metropolitan College of New York and in 2005, became Acting Associate Dean for Student Opportunities at Hunter College. Cantarella continues to serve in leadership roles on not-for-profit boards and committees.

Marcia Cantarella was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 20, 2007 and July 20, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marcia Cantarella was conducted by Shawn Wilson and Adrienne Jones on April 20, 2007 and July 20, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacam SP videocassettes. Academic administrator and corporate executive Marcia Cantarella (1946 - ) started her career with Avon Products, Inc. and then became Executive Director of the National Coalition for Women’s Enterprise. She serves as the Acting Associate Dean for Student Opportunities at Hunter College.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Cantarella, Cantarella
Wilson, Shawn Jones, Adrienne (Interviewers)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Marcia Cantarella--Interviews

African American college administrators.

African American executives.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/5/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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, April 20, 2007 and July 20, 2007**

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_001_001, TRT: 0:30:18 2007/04/20

Marcia Cantarella was born on October 31, 1946 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her mother, Margaret Buckner Young, was born on March 20, 1922 in Kentucky to Eva and Frank Buckner. Though born in Kentucky, Margaret grew up in Aurora, Illinois where her mother was a homemaker and her father was a fire fighter. She went on to attend Kentucky State University for her undergraduate studies and obtained her M.A. degree in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota. She later taught educational psychology at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Cantarella’s father, Whitney Moore Young, Jr., was born on June 31, 1921, in Shelby County, Kentucky. His father, Whitney Moore Young, Sr. was the president of Lincoln Institute, an all-black boarding school in Simpsonville, Kentucky. Cantarella’s paternal grandmother, Laura Ray Young, was the first black postmistress. Both Whitney, Sr. and Laura Ray were well respected in their community and were connected to other influential middle class African American families. Whitney Jr. courted Margaret while they were students at Kentucky State University, then a historically black college; it has since integrated. Whitney, Jr. graduated with his B.A. degree in social work in 1940 or 1941.

African American families--Kentucky.
African American educators.
African Americans--Social life and customs--Kentucky.
African American college students--Kentucky State University.
African Americans--Education (Higher)--University of Minnesota.
Young, Whitney M.
African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Kentucky--Simpsonville.
Lincoln Institute (Simpsonville, Ky.).

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_001_002, TRT: 0:30:01 2007/04/20

Marcia Cantarella recalls her early childhood experiences in Omaha, Nebraska, where her father, Whitney Moore Young, Jr., was the leading figure in Omaha’s National Urban League. Cantarella describes Omaha as a fairly integrated city, noting the integrated elementary school and ballet courses in which she was enrolled. She admits that while Omaha was relatively diverse, her social experiences were largely limited to black communities. In 1953, Cantarella moved south to Atlanta, Georgia, a decision her mother argued would limit the opportunities the family would have. She goes on to discuss her father’s involvement in Atlanta’s civil rights activities and his efforts to bail out students jailed for protesting. Cantarella’s consciousness regarding the Civil Right Movement was inspired by the boycotts of department stores. She, then, turns her attention to the integrated Unitarian Church in Atlanta that she
attended with her father. Cantarella remembers the Sunday school class’s lone white participant named Suzanne. Cantarella befriended Suzanne, whose mother was a liberal writer and progressive thinker. She discusses the circumstances surrounding the bombing of Suzanne’s home. Cantarella wonders if it was because of their interracial friendship or Suzanne’s mother’s progressive ideas and writings.

African American families--Nebraska--Omaha.
African Americans--Social life and customs--Nebraska--Omaha.
Civil rights movements--Georgia--Atlanta.
Unitarian--Universalist churches--Georgia--Atlanta.
Race relations--United States.
African American children.
Students--Political activity--Georgia--Atlanta.
Young, Whitney M.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_001_003, TRT: 0:29:37 2007/04/20

Marcia Cantarella returns to a discussion of the Unitarian Universalists Church she attended with her father. She and her father appreciated the Unitarian’s egalitarian stance and its proactive congregation. Cantarella talks about her family’s move to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she attended a private school and her father accepted a one-year postgraduate fellowship at Harvard University under the auspices of a Rockefeller Foundation grant. She goes on to discuss the inner-workings of the organizations involved in the Civil Rights Movement. As the daughter of a movement leader, she recalls the many meetings held in her family’s living room; giving her an insider’s view of civil rights strategizing and activities. Cantarella also discusses the family’s move to New Rochelle, New York, where her father assumed the presidency of the National Urban League. She elaborates on the school she attended once in New York, which consisted of a mix of Italian, Jewish and African American students. Cantarella also mentions her decision to enroll at Bryn Mawr College for her undergraduate studies. She concludes with a discussion of her father’s inability to take a hard stand on the Vietnam War, yet his admiration for Cantarella’s strong opposition to the war.

Unitarian--Universalist churches--Georgia--Atlanta.
Civil rights workers.
African American children--Education--Massachusetts--Cambridge.
Harvard University.
National Urban League.
African American students--Bryn Mawr College.
Young, Whitney M.
Civil rights movement--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/04/20

Marcia Cantarella talks about her activism as a student. She was deeply involved in the anti-Vietnam War protests during her undergraduate years at Bryn Mawr College. While at Bryn Mawr, Cantarella interacted with various militant political organizations. She also recalls the summer she interned at Robert F. Kennedy’s senate office, where she endured sexism, not racial
discrimination. She goes on to describe her father’s contribution to the Civil Rights Movement as being instrumental in ensuring that African Americans could elevate themselves through education and job opportunities. Cantarella returns to issues regarding gender and the ways in which women are often encouraged to either get married or pursue jobs as secretaries or teachers.


Students--Political activity--Bryn Mawr College.

Kennedy, Robert F.,--1925-1968.

Sexual division of labor.

Sex discrimination in employment.

Young, Whitney M.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_001_005, TRT: 0:29:32 2007/04/20

Marcia Cantarella continues to discuss her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as her father’s activism. She also discusses how the customs and policies for female students at Bryn Mawr College changed dramatically throughout her undergraduate studies. The school administrators were initially very strict and enforced restrictive student dress codes and visitation rules. Cantarella then turns her attention to the death of her father who drowned during a trip to Lagos, Nigeria in 1971. At the time of her father’s death, Cantarella was living with her husband in Morocco, where she was also teaching. She returned to the U.S. for her father’s funeral and divorced her husband in tandem. She concludes with a discussion of her early forays into professional and academic careers.

Civil rights movement.

Bryn Mawr College.

Young, Whitney M.--Death and burial.

African American educators.

Women--Education (Higher)--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcia Cantarella, Section A2007_152_002_006, TRT: 0:29:47 2007/07/20

Marcia Cantarella discusses the inner-workings and shifts in Avon Product Inc.’s corporate values and how it shaped her relationship with the company and its leadership. Cantarella started working with Avon in 1972 in the public affairs department. At the time, David Mitchell, the company’s chairman, was an exemplar of corporate responsibility as well as a very humane and caring person. When Mitchell retired, Hicks Waldron became the CEO of Avon and brought a different kind of leadership to the company. By this time, Cantarella had transitioned into the marketing department and was doing research on the importance of black and Hispanic markets for Avon. According to Cantarella, under the direction of Waldron, Avon had acquired a lot of debt. Cantarella states that she was uncomfortable with the way the leadership handled this matter and felt powerless as a manager. It was at this point that Cantarella decided to leave Avon and started consulting on work and family issues. She also talks about her graduate studies at New York University, where she earned her Ph.D. in American Studies.

Avon Products, Inc.

African Americans executives.

African American students--Education (Higher)--New York (State)--New York.
Marcia Cantarella discusses her foray into academia, specifically the various administrative roles she has undertaken. She served as director of Academic Achievement Program and as director of Academic Enhancement Programs at New York University (NYU). In this role, she helped inspire and provide support and opportunities for African American and Latino students. Cantarella attributes her commitment to empowering young people to her Unitarian Universalists faith traditions, which embraces self-empowerment and helping to change the world's conditions and circumstances. While at NYU, Cantarella developed and taught a course at the Gallatin School for Individualized Study. In 1996, Cantarella earned her Ph.D. degree in American Studies from NYU. She goes on to discuss her various administrative positions at Princeton University, Audrey Cohen College—now Metropolitan College of New York—and Hunter College. Cantarella states that working with students as well as women entrepreneurs has roots in the work her family was committed to, placing value on personal empowerment, education, economic mobility and helping people improve their lives.

African Americans--Religion.
Vocational guidance.
African American educators--New York (State)--New York.
New York University.Gallatin Division.
College students--New York (State)--New York.
Unitarianism.
African American Unitarian Universalists.

Marcia Cantarella narrates personal photographs on this tape.