

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John Hope Franklin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Franklin, John Hope, 1915-2009
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin,
Dates:	November 28, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:54:13).
Abstract:	African american history professor John Hope Franklin (1915 - 2009) is known as the "dean" of African American historians and has published hundreds of articles and at least fifteen books. Franklin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 28, 2003, in College Park, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_281
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dean of African American historians, John Hope Franklin was born January 2, 1915 in Rentiesville, Oklahoma. His family relocated to Tulsa, Oklahoma shortly after the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. Franklin's mother, Mollie was a teacher and his father, B.C. Franklin was an attorney who handled lawsuits precipitated by the famous Tulsa Race Riot. Graduating from Booker T. Washington High School in 1931, Franklin received an A.B. from Fisk University in 1935 and went on to attend Harvard University, where he received his A.M. and Ph.D. degrees in history.

Franklin began his teaching career at Fisk University before moving on to St. Augustine's College. It was at North Carolina Central University, in 1945, with a \$500 advance from Alfred A. Knopf, and help from his wife, Aurelia, that Franklin began writing the classic African American history text, *From Slavery to Freedom*. The book, co-authored by Alfred A. Moss, Jr. is now in its seventh edition and is published in several different languages. Franklin taught at Howard University for nine years, before becoming the first black to chair the History Department at Brooklyn College in 1956. He was then hired by the University of Chicago in 1964 and chaired the History Department from 1967 to 1970. There, he served as the John Matthews Manly Distinguished Service Professor from 1969 to 1982, when he was made Professor Emeritus. In 1982, Franklin joined the faculty at Duke University as the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of History.

Active in professional organizations, Franklin has been president of the Southern Historical Society, the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association. He is a life long member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, where he served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Negro History*. In 1997, he was appointed by President Bill Clinton as chairman of the advisory board for One America, the President's Initiative on Race.

Franklin has written hundreds of articles and at least 15 books. His recent works include *Runaway Slaves: Rebels*

on the Plantations with Loren Schweninger, George Washington Williams: A Biography and a book about his father My Life and an Era: the Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin as well as his own autobiography, The Vintage Years. In 1978 Who's Who in America selected Franklin as one of eight Americans who have made significant contributions to society. Among his many other awards are the Organization of American Historians Award for Outstanding Achievement and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In June 1997, PBS aired First Person Singular: John Hope Franklin, a film produced by Lives and Legacies Films.

Still sought after as a lecturer and advisor, Franklin lives in Durham, North Carolina, where he cultivates orchids.

Franklin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 28, 2003.

Bibliography

Franklin, John Hope. The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790 - 1860. University of North Carolina Press, 1943. --
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Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John Hope Franklin was conducted by Walter Hill on November 28, 2003, in College Park, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. African american history professor John Hope Franklin (1915 - 2009) is known as the "dean" of African American historians and has published hundreds of articles and at least fifteen books.

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:

Franklin, John Hope, 1915-2009

Hill, Walter (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Franklin, John Hope, 1915-2009 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

African American History Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 John Hope Franklin, November 28, 2003. 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 John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_001, TRT: 0:30:27 ?

Historian John Hope Franklin discusses his family's history. Franklin's mother, Mollie Lee Parker, was born to a sizable family in Tennessee in 1879. She was a schoolteacher who he describes as having been a strict disciplinarian with a strong personality. Franklin's mother met his father when they were both students at Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee. Buck Colbert Franklin was also born in 1879 in the Indian Territory that is now Oklahoma. He was a brilliant student who influenced his son to love reading and writing. Franklin discusses the historical events his parents witnessed, having been alive at the turn of the century. Franklin explains names in his family, including those of his father, brother and son. John Hope Franklin reveals that his father's legal profession encouraged him to pursue law. He describes his undergraduate years at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee as a positive experience out of which he met an influential mentor as well as his future wife. Franklin then attended Harvard University to further study history. The mentoring he received at Fisk contributed to the confident attitude he brought with him to Harvard. He describes the black population at Harvard as small and he remembers one classmate who would become a high-ranking politician.

Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_002, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Historian John Hope Franklin discusses the radicalism that he witnessed as a Fisk University student during the economically and socially turbulent 1930s; he describes Harvard University as far more "conservative" or "orthodox." Franklin recalls completing his graduate work at the same time that the events of World War II were unfolding. Franklin recalls he and his wife, Aurelia, were married around the time that he worked on his dissertation; he remembers his wife being with him each step of the way. Franklin remembers his academic mentors and describes his own broad approach to historical inquiry. Having taught at several academic institutions, Franklin was invited to join the faculty at Howard University in Washington, D.C., a post he ultimately accepted. Franklin explains that an editor encouraged him to write a book chronicling the lives of African Americans. This project became his renowned tome, 'From Slavery to Freedom.' Franklin considers the work of those scholars of African American history who preceded him, including that of Dr. Carter G. Woodson. He finally discusses the success of 'From Freedom to Slavery,' with its eight editions and translation into six languages.

Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_003, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Historian John Hope Franklin describes that while 'From Slavery to Freedom' was his most renowned text, his favorite book to write was a biography of religious leader and historian George Washington Williams. Franklin recalls the events of 1947, an important year with respect to race relations in the United States. Jackie Robinson's integration of the major leagues mirrored Franklin's appointment as chair of the history department at Brooklyn College, a predominantly white institution, some nine years later. Franklin describes that while several prestigious universities invited him to conduct courses, The University of Chicago offered him a full professorship and an appointment as chair of their history department. He and his family moved to Chicago, Illinois. Franklin describes his wife's full support of his career and her commitment to their family. He explains that fatherhood made him into a more responsible man. Franklin discusses Dr. Carter G. Woodson's passing and subsequent interest in Franklin as the next leader of the Association for the Study of the Negro Life in History; Franklin declined the offer. Finally, Franklin reviews the events leading up to the Civil Rights Movement and he discusses his role as a researcher in the influential 'Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas' trial.

Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_004, TRT: 0:30:04 ?

Historian John Hope Franklin discusses his commitment to separating his political activism from his scholarship. He goes on to describe his unique brand of activism. Franklin shares his impressions of the Soviet Union, gleaned from his travels there during the Cold War. Franklin explains that his decision to leave Brooklyn College for the University of Chicago was motivated by his interest in mentoring doctoral students; Brooklyn College had not yet established such programs of study. Franklin discusses his students' interest in questions of race and gender and he defends himself against accusations of conducting scholarship concerned exclusively with men. Franklin goes on to review the numerous international posts he has held, both academic and governmental. He explains his rationale for leaving Chicago to return to the South. He also explains coming out of retirement to take a position with Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Franklin then discusses the changing content of his scholarship and how his public addresses reflect these evolving interests.

Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_005, TRT: 0:30:54 ?

Historian John Hope Franklin describes his respect for scholar David Levering Lewis. Franklin goes on to discuss his own 135 honorary degrees, though he expresses some doubt as to what such honors measure or represent. Franklin describes his love of horticulture and, specifically, orchids. He shows pride in his extensive orchid collection and makes claims as to the flowers' therapeutic quality. Franklin considers his and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s responses to the Vietnam War, but reiterates the importance of separating one's work as an activist from his/her scholarship. Franklin describes the circumstances around President Bill Clinton's 1997 appointment of him as chair of the Advisory Board on Race Relations. Franklin describes the organization's mandates as well as his own approaches to their tasks. He then considers the historical significance of Clinton's initiative.

Video Oral History Interview with John Hope Franklin, Section A2003_281_001_006, TRT: 0:21:54 ?

John Hope Franklin discusses the publication of his father's autobiography. He

describes both his own and his son's roles in seeing the book project to fruition. Franklin discusses his own autobiography which he has been writing for four years. With respect to his hopes for the African American community, Franklin emphasizes integration. Though not entirely optimistic about the prospects of full integration, Franklin is committed to the principle. This approach also translates to his ideas on scholarship; Franklin insists that African American history become successfully integrated into American history, rather than comprising its own discipline. Franklin considers the legacies of the Franklin men, from his grandfather to his son, and his own legacy emphasizes his lifelong commitment to teaching and being taught. Franklin expresses regret with respect to his own language acquisition. While he missed opportunities to learn foreign languages, he encouraged such study in his son's life. Upon publishing his latest book, Franklin plans to go fishing.