

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Curtis King

PERSON

**King, Curtis, 1951-**

**Alternative Names:** Curtis King;

**Life Dates:** December 20, 1951-

**Place of Birth:** Coldwater, Mississippi, USA

**Work:** Dallas, Texas

**Occupations:** Arts Administrator

## Biographical Note

Curtis King, founder of The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated (TBAAL) of Dallas, Texas, was born December 20, 1951, in Coldwater, Mississippi; his father, Jonah King, was a farmer, and his mother, Elizabeth McGee King, was a schoolteacher. King graduated in 1969 from segregated Tate County High School where he enjoyed writing and acting in plays. At Jackson State University, King was mentored by poet Margaret Walker Alexander, who sent him to Chicago in 1972 for the historic Black Academy of Arts and Letters (BAAL) National Conference to Assess the State of Black Arts and Letters in the United States of America. At the conference King was not only inspired by John Oliver Killens, Harry Belafonte, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Romare Bearden, Alvin Ailey, Charles White, C. Eric Lincoln and others, but got their phone numbers as well.

Earning his master's degree in theater from Texas Christian University in 1974, King worked for the Mayor's Council on Youth Opportunity in Fort Worth, and the Sojourner Truth Theater Company after graduation. King was teaching theater at Shaw University in 1977 when he learned that the BAAL had gone defunct in 1976. Using \$250, King formed the Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters (later The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Incorporated, or TBAAL) in homage to BAAL in 1977. TBAAL went on to become the only African American multidisciplinary cultural arts organization housed inside a major urban convention center. TBAAL occupies 250,000 square feet of space in the Dallas Convention Center, and includes: the 1,750 seat Naomi Burton Theatre, Clarence Muse Cafe Theatre, James E. Kemp Art Gallery, and the Eva Jessye Gift Shop. TBAAL attracts hundreds of thousands of people annually.

Known for his artistic and administrative skills and celebrity contacts, King produced various celebrity tributes. King also produced the National Civil War Gala at

Washington's Lincoln Theatre Center for the Performing Arts in 2000. King is the recipient of the Larry Leon Hamlin Producer's Award, Man of the Year Dream Makers Award, Esquire Magazine Register Award, the Dallas Historical Society's Arts Leadership Award, the Texas Ambassador of Goodwill Award and the World Peace Award in the Arts from the Interreligious and International Federation for World Peace in 2004.

## Related Entries

**Tate County High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Jackson State University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**Texas Christian University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**M.A.**

**City of Fort Worth** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1974 to ?]

**Sojourner Truth Theater Company** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1974 to ?]

**Shaw University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1977 to ?]

**Theater Professor**

**Junior Black Academy of Arts and Letters (Later known as The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, Inc. or TBAAL.)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1977 to ?]

**Founder**