

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles F. Harris

PERSON

Harris, Charles F., 1934-2015

**Alternative Names:** Charles F. Harris; There is a Charles F. Harris on the LoC website, but I'm not sure if it is him.

**Life Dates:** January 3, 1934-December 16, 2015

**Place of Birth:** Portsmouth, Virginia, USA

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Book Publishing Executive

## Biographical Note

Pioneering book publishing executive Charles F. Harris was born on January 3, 1934 in Portsmouth, Virginia. During his elementary school days, Harris delivered newspapers in the community to make some extra money. His father insisted that he not deliver something that he did not read. Harris accepted his father's challenge and became an avid reader at an early age. Graduating in 1955, from Virginia State University with a B.A. degree, he served in the Infantry of the United States Army and received an Honorable Discharge as a First Lieutenant.

Harris began his publishing career in 1956 at Doubleday & Company where, in 1965, as editor of Doubleday's Publishing Division he launched the Zenith Book Series, which focused on African American history for elementary and high school students. He also acquired original manuscripts for publication and edited works by John Hope Franklin, Robert Weaver, Rayford Logan, and Jim Brown. Joining Random House in 1967 as senior editor, Harris edited *Amistad*, two volumes of writings on African American History and culture. This paperback magazine was launched in 1970 and was aimed at college humanities and social science courses. He also acquired *The Greatest* by Muhammad Ali with Richard Durham.

In 1971, Harris was recruited to create and manage the Howard University Press, where he served as the first chief executive, supervising all book publishing until 1986. He founded *Amistad Press Inc.* in 1986 to specialize in the works of African American themes. Its publishing program includes works by Arthur Ashe, John H. Johnson, Susan Taylor, Congressman William L. Clay, as well as the critically acclaimed *Amistad Literary Series*, which features critical studies of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Gloria Naylor, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

In 1999, Harris sold Amistad Press to HarperCollins Publishers, and he joined HarperCollins as Vice President Editorial Director of this new imprint and as an executive editor for the HarperCollins General Books Group. Harris also authored a monthly column on Bet.com. In 2003, Harris left HarperCollins Publishers to once again start his own publishing company, Alpha Zenith Media Inc., where he continued to publish works critical to the African American community.

Harris passed away on December 16, 2015.

## Related Entries

**I.C. Norcom High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

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

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

**New York University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Norfolk Journal and Guide** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Writer**

**Doubleday Publishing Company** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Editor**

**Portal Press** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Vice President and General Manager**

**Random House Publishing** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Senior Editor**

**Howard University Press** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Director**

**Amistad Press** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Founder**

**Alpha Zenith Media Inc.** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

## Founder

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

## Member