

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harold Pates

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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>	Pates, Harold, 1931-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 12, 2005 and July 10, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005 and 2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	19 Betacame SP videocassettes (9:09:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Cultural activist, college president, and teacher Harold Pates (1931 - ) is the former president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago. He has worked with numerous organizations dedicated to infusing the African American experience into the educational system, and is founding director of the All African World Virtual University. Pates was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 12, 2005 and July 10, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_263
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator and cultural activist Harold Pates was born October 31, 1931, in Macon, Mississippi. His great aunt, raised in slavery, lost two fingers to her master for attempting to read. Pates' parents, Amanda Beasley Pates and Squire Pates were graduates of Bolivar Training School in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. Migrating to Chicago, Illinois, Pates attended Forestville Elementary School and DuSable High School graduating in 1948. Taught music by DuSable's Captain Walter Dyett, Pates played with Eddie Harris, Richard Davis, John Gilmore, Jimmy Ellis and other future greats. Pates graduated from Wilson Junior College in 1952 and DePaul University with his B.A. degree in English in 1954. He earned his M.A. degree from DePaul in 1956 and received his PhD degree from the University of Chicago in 1976.

Pates taught at Fuller Elementary School and Forestville Elementary School, and was assistant principal of DuSable Upper Grade Center from 1964 to 1968. He served as a counselor at DuSable Upper Grade Center and High School and as a guidance counselor for the Hyde Park Evening School. As teacher and administrator, Pates joined Lawrence Landry, Lu and Jorja Palmer, Rev. C.T. Vivian, Lorenzo Martin, Bobby E. Wright, and others in agitating for African American concerns in the Chicago Public Schools. In 1968, he joined Loop College where he became director of the Admissions Department. Pates also taught at Loyola University, George Williams College, Northeastern Illinois University, and Concordia College. He also helped plan the first Upward Bound Program. Appointed dean of career programs at Malcolm X College in 1981, Pates moved on to Kennedy-King College as a dean in 1983. In 1986, Pates was named president of Kennedy-King College, serving until 1997. At Kennedy-King, he provided access for cultural and civic organizations and events at an unprecedented level.

Active in efforts to generate an African version of the history and culture of Africa and to infuse the black experience into the educational system, Pates was a founder of the Chicago Communiversity and the Association

of African Educators with Anderson Thompson in the late 1960s. He was a founding member of the Kemet Institute, the Association of Black Psychologists, the National Association of Black School Educators, the Black United Front, the Chicago Task Force for Black Political Empowerment, the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, and the Harold Washington Institute. Recipient of numerous awards, ranging from the Chancellors Award for outstanding Leadership to the Muntu Dance Theatre's Alyo Award, Pates currently serves on the board of the Black United Fund of Illinois and the advisory board of the Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies of Northeastern Illinois University. He is founding director of the All African World Virtual University. Fit, playing full court basketball into his 70s, Pates, now retired, enjoys golf and playing jazz on the cornet.

A widower, Pates has a grown daughter and son.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harold Pates was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 12, 2005 and July 10, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 19 Betacame SP videocassettes. Cultural activist, college president, and teacher Harold Pates (1931 - ) is the former president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago. He has worked with numerous organizations dedicated to infusing the African American experience into the educational system, and is founding director of the All African World Virtual University.

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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

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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:

Pates, Harold, 1931-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Pates, Harold, 1931- --Interviews

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African American college presidents--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African American educators--Illinois--Chicago--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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**Occupations:**

Cultural Activist

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College President

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Teacher

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|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 Harold Pates, December 12, 2005 and July 10, 2006. 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).

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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

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Harold Pates was born on October 31, 1931 in Macon, Mississippi to Amanda Beasley Pates and Squire Pates. His mother was born in Noxubee County, Mississippi; she refused to tell Pates about her family history, which he believes was due to shame inherited from the era of slavery. Pates' maternal family was light-complexioned and belonged to the A.M.E. church. His mother attended Bolivar County Training School in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, where she met his father, and became a schoolteacher in Okolona, Mississippi and Tuskegee, Alabama. She was also a renowned seamstress in her community. Pates also recalls a family friend, Sister Babe, who worked as a domestic for a white family and frequently was forced to demand her paychecks. Pates was raised in Chicago, Illinois, where he was not allowed to visit his aunt and her husband, who had a gambling ring in their home. Each summer during childhood, Pates traveled on segregated trains to visit his maternal grandparents in Mississippi. African American college presidents--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American educators--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Harold Pates recalls visiting his great-aunt, Sarah, who had the tips of two of her fingers severed while enslaved and was in Vicksburg, Mississippi when General Ulysses S. Grant entered the city. His father, Squire Pates, was born in 1894 and raised in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, where he grew up in the household of the town's founder, Isaiah T. Montgomery, and worked in Ben A. Green's drug store. During his childhood, Pates and his brother Henry spent summers in Macon, Mississippi with his maternal grandmother, who warned him to be accommodating toward whites in the town. He recalls playing on his grandmother's dairy farm and swimming in the creek on those visits. At the age of twelve, Pates and his brother were accused by a white boy of stealing his money, and were threatened by a white drug store clerk with a shotgun after complaining about being given warm sodas. After learning about these confrontations, his grandmother sent them home to Chicago, Illinois and warned them not to return to Macon.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Harold Pates' father, Squire Pates, moved from Mound Bayou, Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois in 1927 to work for the post office, where he remained for forty years. He recalls a special elevated train line in his neighborhood for stockyard

workers, and the riots after African Americans were hired to replace striking Polish workers. Pates had two siblings: his brother Henry Pates, who worked with him as a paperboy and joined the U.S. Marine Corps after high school, and Patricia Pates Eaton, who moved to New York City, where she attended Columbia University and sang with the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera. He reflects upon learning from his father's Aunt Sarah how her fingers were severed by her white owners while she was enslaved, and upon his father's advice to be wary of whites in positions of authority. At nine years old, Pates became a paperboy, delivering the Chicago Daily Times and Chicago Tribune with his brother on the city's South Side. He woke at 4:30 each morning to deliver seventy papers.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Harold Pates grew up in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. He recalls the neighborhood community and the many celebrities there, including the Reverend M.J. Divine, who led marches on King Drive, singers like Cab Calloway, Sarah Vaughan, and Lena Horne, who performed at venues such as the Rhumboogie Café and the Regal Theater, and boxers such as Joe Louis, whose bouts Pates watched at the Savoy Ballroom. Pates also talks about community-owned businesses such as the Perfect Eat Shop and the Parkway Ballroom. He began working as a paperboy at nine years old, and after a few years expanded his route to include the white neighborhoods east of Cottage Grove Avenue, where he once was held at gunpoint by a police officer. With his friend Charles Arrington, Pates started running policy in gambling rings that were mostly condoned by his community, including by Rev. Clarence H. Cobbs. At the age of twelve, he bribed a city worker to get a driver's license, so that he could work delivering policy.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Harold Pates recalls influential community leaders in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois, including preachers Clarence H. Cobbs and Louis A. Boddie, tailor Louis "Scotty" Piper, and politician "Billy Goat" Brown. During his childhood, musicians Bo Diddley and Muddy Waters often performed in the neighborhood. Pates recalls visiting the Harding museum and hearing Lionel Hampton play at the Savoy Ballroom. His father, Squire Pates, subscribed to The Pittsburgh Courier and was active in the NAACP, for which he worked to solicit new members. Pates' father campaigned on behalf of anti-lynching laws and against systemic racial discrimination in government. Race riots sometimes took place on 63rd and 79th Street Beaches, and Pates and his brother were often attacked by white youths while walking through the neighborhood of Hyde Park to reach Lake Michigan. Pates talks about segregation in Chicago's hotels, and the Roberts Motel chain founded by Herman Roberts.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_006, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Harold Pates recalls seeing political leaders like William L. Dawson, Harold Washington, and Leon Despres in his childhood neighborhood of Bronzeville. He attended Forestville Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. His second grade teacher, Mrs. Prentice, often read 'Little Black Sambo' to her class, and Pates' father once reprimanded her for grabbing Pates by the neck while he was misbehaving. Pates eventually had four black teachers in elementary school, including Frances T. Matlock, whom he credits for challenging him educationally and teaching propriety. His main job was delivering newspapers, but he would make extra money by selling coal and wood. Pates was named a patrol boy in eighth grade, and took boxing classes with Tony Zale at the

Catholic Youth Organization gym. He recalls working part-time in a junk garage and interacting with street vendors like icemen and coalmen in his neighborhood community. Later, Pates lived in the Rosenwald Building for four years in the early 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Harold Pates accompanied his father, Squire Pates, to hear W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson speak when he was about ten years old. He recalls how Du Bois' succinct responses to questions and how Robeson was shunned by some for his communist views. He and his father frequented the Washington Park Forum, where they met Ishmael Flory and Frederick "Hammurabi" Robb. Growing up in Chicago, Pates was neighbors with William Cousins, Jr., whom he remembers receiving a scholarship to Harvard University. Pates attended Jean Baptiste Point DuSable High School in Chicago, where he played saxophone in the band under Walter Dyett. His bandmates included many future musicians, like Johnny Griffin, Eddie Harris, Von Freeman, and John Gilmore. Pates recalls gang activity and having to win a fight as a freshman to prove himself. With several classmates, he formed a band and played at Chicago's Beige Room, Pershing Ballroom and Rhumboogie Cafe, although the experience discouraged him from pursuing a music career.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_008, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Harold Pates' father supported his childhood education by helping him to read classic novels. Pates graduated from DuSable High School in Chicago, Illinois in 1948. He was offered music scholarships to Tennessee State University and Kentucky State University, but his father, Squire Pates, forbade him to attend college in the South. Instead, Pates went to work at the Wisconsin Steel factory in Chicago, where he experienced the oil dust permeating his body and suffered a back injury. He decided to follow his father's advice to attend college. He enrolled at Woodrow Wilson Junior College, where he almost dropped out after failing his first semester and being dissuaded by a counselor. However, his father convinced him to keep going, and, upon improving his grades, Pates transferred to DePaul University. He majored in English, played for the school band, and got to know sports stars Carl Ennis and Bill Robinzine. After graduating with a B.A. degree in English, he was hired as a schoolteacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_001\_009, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Harold Pates attended DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, where he majored in English. He befriended Italian American classmates, including Joseph Lagattuta, and was invited to their family parties, although he was confused and cautious around Italian culture, especially its food. Pates recalls his impressions of Catholicism and his experiences as one of very few African American students at DePaul University. He graduated in 1953 and sought work as a Chicago Public Schools teacher, but he was required to take classes at Chicago Teachers College before he could be certified. Pates' first positions as a teacher were at the all-girls Foster School, where he learned techniques to manage a classroom of female students, and an Americanization school, where he helped recent immigrants to acclimate to the country. In 1956, he was hired to teach at Fuller Elementary School, where he was mentored by several female teachers. Pates also describes his brother Henry Pates' career in the United States Marine Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_010, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Harold Pates began teaching at Melville W. Fuller Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois during the mid-1950s. He recalls playing a prank on the three female teachers who carpooled to work with him, and feuding with the principal,

who was overly punitive toward older African American boys. Pates married Maxine Pates in 1957, and they had two children. Around 1960, he moved to Forestville Elementary School, which Pates attended as a boy, to teach under Principal Herbert Zimmerman. Pates' students there included Georgia Tribett Reed and Geneva Smitherman, who both became published writers. At Forestville Elementary School, he worked with a relatively large number of male teachers. He also formed a jam band with some of his co-workers. After Zimmerman's departure, Pates quarreled with his replacement, Principal Margolis. He also describes the racial discrimination in the Chicago Public Schools' hiring practices, which led many qualified black men, including Allen P. Collard, to be denied certification.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_011, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

Harold Pates taught from 1960 at Forestville Elementary School in Chicago, where the principal criticized his natural hair and beard and micromanaged his class. In 1964, Pates became an assistant principal at DuSable High School under Principal Byron Minor, while the school opened the DuSable Upper Grade Center. Pates recalls incidents at the school involving Egyptian Cobras gang activity; a black student who stalked a white teacher after misconstruing their relationship; and the school police officer, who helped Pates when he was attacked by a student who cut class. During the 1960s, Pates protested against the Willis Wagons, surplus classroom trailers placed in schools' parking lots, which were Superintendent Benjamin C. Willis' response to overcrowding in African American districts. The protests empowered black civic organizations in Chicago, including Chicago Council of Community Organizations, and paved the way for the hiring of black administrators like Barbara A. Sizemore and Ruth Love.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_012, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Harold Pates recalls how classmates of his at Chicago's Forestville Elementary School were moved to Dunbar Trade School at the age of twelve, and how African American teenagers, unlike whites, were not trained for union trades. He was an assistant principal at DuSable Upper Grade Center from 1964 to 1968, but left the school after the hiring of Principal Galeta Kaar, who prioritized order over educational achievement and required teachers to complete errands unrelated to school. Pates joined the Upward Bound college preparation program at Loyola University Chicago, where he taught entering students alongside Barney Berlin and Anderson Thompson. Berlin subsequently recruited Pates to work in Loyola's teacher training institute. Pates founded the Association of Afro-American Educators, and worked with Bobby E. Wright to support black public school teachers in Chicago through the Black Teachers Caucus. He also recalls the leadership of Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian at Chicago's Christ Temple Apostolic Faith Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_013, TRT: 0:30:42 ?

Harold Pates recalls racial confrontations at sporting events between white and black neighborhoods in Chicago and during the integration of Catholic schools. He also comments on the racism of figures like politician George Wallace and police officer Sylvester "Two-Gun Pete" Washington. In 1965, Pates travelled south with Wellington Wilson to participate in the Selma to Montgomery marches alongside Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian. Pates supported Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. despite concerns over racial segregation among the marchers and the anti-communist spying operated by the FBI through COINTELPRO. After Dr. King's assassination, he witnessed rioting along Chicago's 63rd Street, as well as its suppression by the U.S. Fifth Army. In

1968, Pates was hired at the recommendation of John P. Donohue as director of admissions for Chicago's Loop College, where he was the first black faculty member. He continued to advocate for the rights of black teachers, founding the Institute of Positive Education.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_014, TRT: 0:31:08 ?

Harold Pates opposed the Woodlawn Organization of Chicago, Illinois, which counted Bishop Arthur Brazier and Reverend Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr. among its leaders, because he felt it served the needs of the University of Chicago rather than the community. He recalls the rise of the Blackstone Rangers on Chicago's South Side, and how gang leaders Jeff Fort and Eugene "Bull" Hairston were aided by Reverend John R. Fry. Pates and Anderson Thompson were called to mediate peace talks between the Rangers and the Gangster Disciples, and were shocked to discover how heavily armed both gangs were. In the late 1960s, Pates was inspired to work for African American education by a caucus of black educators at the National Association for College Admission Counseling conference. Pates was a founder of the Communiversity as well as the Association of African American Educators in Chicago. He recalls key institutions of the Black Power movement, such as the Black Panther Party and The Catalyst, founded by Abena Joan P. Brown.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_015, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Harold Pates founded the Communiversity in Chicago, Illinois with partners including Anderson Thompson, Robert N. Rhodes, and Bobby E. Wright. The organization intended to foster opportunities for intellectual discussion among African Americans and to introduce youth to international examples of black culture. Pates believed that African Americans had been deprived of their history and literature by traditional education's Eurocentric version of history. He recalls learning about men like George Washington in school, while only his father taught him about notable African Americans. Pates welcomed speakers such as Stokely Carmichael and James Forman to the Communiversity, and he lectured on the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah. He attended the University of Chicago to study for his doctorate, but feuded with professors like Sol Tax, an anthropology professor who said that African Americans were an example of an underdeveloped culture, and Edward Shils, who dismissed non-western cultures as peripheral.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_016, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Harold Pates became director of admissions at Loop College in Chicago, Illinois in 1968. He was criticized, including by college president David Heller, for recruiting and accepting a larger percentage of black students than in the past. Pates worked with black faculty in the City Colleges of Chicago, including Charles Hurst, Maceo Bowie and Wayne Watson. In 1981, he was hired as dean of career programs at Malcolm X College. Pates and Anderson Thompson were organizers in support of Harold Washington's 1983 campaign for mayor of Chicago. In the mid-1980s, he was appointed president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood. Harold Washington's appointees, like Reynaldo Glover and Nelvia M. Brady, were largely supportive of Pates, who developed the school's academics. However, board chairman Ronald Gidwitz pushed him to add menial job training programs. He recalls a critical story on the college produced by Jim Avila of ABC, and welcoming resident cultural groups like Muntu Dance Theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_017, TRT: 0:28:13 ?

Harold Pates served as president of Kennedy-King College in Chicago, Illinois, where he made college-owned rooms available to community group, improved



the media department and nursing program, hosted a monthly African market, and worked along with his wife Maxine Pates to support a community scholarship fund. Following the election of Mayor Richard M. Daley and the end of Nelvia M. Brady's term as chancellor of the City Colleges of Chicago, his relationship with the city worsened. Pates opposed plans to construct a new facility for Kennedy-King and to relocate the school from Englewood, instead favoring renovation of the existing building. He comments on the objections of Christian ministers to his choice to display a banner of the Egyptian god Thoth at Kennedy-King. In 1994, Pates resigned from the presidency, and from that time worked on a history of Chicago in the late 20th century and an autobiography. He reflects upon his life, concluding that there is little he would have done differently.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_018, TRT: 0:28:23 ?

Harold Pates describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He offers his views on the works and statements of community leaders such as Michael Eric Dyson, Minister Louis Farrakhan and Tavis Smiley. Pates' wife, Maxine Pates, passed away in 1995, and he since remarried to Jeannie Dorsey-Pates. He has a daughter, Shelley Pates Williams, and a son, Cyrus Pates, as well as three granddaughters, upon whom he bestowed African names to teach them about their heritage. Pates continued to play music recreationally throughout his life, changing instruments as an adult from the saxophone to the cornet. At the time of the interview, he played regularly with a group of older musicians. He reflects upon the importance of rejecting materialism and his legacy as a teacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Pates, Section A2005\_263\_002\_019, TRT: 0:14:41 ?

Harold Pates describes how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.