

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harry Robinson, Jr.

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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>	Robinson, Harry, 1941-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 4, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:57:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Archivist and museum executive Harry Robinson, Jr. (1941 - ) joined Bishop College as librarian and director of its African American museum. Under his leadership the African American Museum in Dallas became independent, expanded its collection, and built a new facility in Dallas' Fair Park. Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 4, 2006, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_089
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Museum director, Harry Robinson, Jr. was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on September 16, 1941. His mother, Ruth, and father, Harry Sr., raised their family in Raceland Louisiana, where Robinson attended Pitman and Kent Hadley elementary schools. The family moved to Thibodaux, Louisiana the year Robinson entered high school. He attended C.M. Washington High School where he came under the tutelage of his industrial arts teacher. However, health reasons prompted Robinson to instead major in history and minor in library science, and he received his B.A. degree from Southern University in 1964.

Robinson attended graduate school at Atlanta University and majored in Library Science. It is here where Robinson researched volumes of African American history making him a legend in his field. Robinson received his M.S.L.S. degree in 1965 from Atlanta University and returned to Southern University to continue his work as an archivist. Robinson went on to become a cataloger at Kentucky State University and worked at the University of Florida.

After earning his Ed.D in 1969 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and heading up special collections for Alabama State University, Robinson joined Bishop College in Dallas as librarian and museum director in 1974. With his negotiation skills, Robinson was able to acquire many collections for the museum. Under his leadership, a new facility was built in 1984 as Fair Park in Dallas to house the collection. The collection includes African American decorative arts, *Sepia Magazine's* photo archive and the carefully researched archaeological specimens of the Freedmen's Cemetery Collection. Robinson has developed the African American Museum in Dallas into a nationally recognized destination for people from all over the world.

Robinson lives in Dallas, Texas. He is the President of the Association of African American Museums, the African American Library Association and a member of the Institute of Museum and Library Science.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harry Robinson, Jr. was conducted by Denise Gines on May 4, 2006, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Archivist and museum executive Harry Robinson, Jr. (1941 - ) joined Bishop College as librarian and director of its African American museum. Under his leadership the African American Museum in Dallas became independent, expanded its collection, and built a new facility in Dallas' Fair Park.

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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

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®.

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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:

Robinson, Harry, 1941-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Robinson, Harry, 1941- --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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African American Museum (Dallas, Tex.)

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### Occupations:

Curator

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Museum Executive

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Harry Robinson, Jr., May 4, 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 Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Harry Robinson Jr. was born on September 6, 1941 in New Orleans, Louisiana to Ruth Farlow Robinson and Harry Robinson, Sr. His maternal great-grandparents were divorced, and his mother was raised in Raceland, Louisiana. Both Robinson's parents were highly intelligent, although they received little schooling. Robinson describes his mother's strong moral principles, and her influence upon his later decision to resign a position at a college library. Robinson's father was also very intelligent, and commanded respect among the community of Raceland. Robinson's parents met when they were teenagers, and were married by the age of twenty years old. His mother worked as a seasonal laborer in the sugarcane fields, and the strenuous work led her to suffer a nervous breakdown when Robinson was five years old. From that time, she worked at a shrimp and oyster factory. Robinson's father worked on a sugarcane plantation, and his family lived in housing provided by the owner. They later moved to Thibodaux, Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Harry Robinson, Jr.'s maternal grandmother, Nancy Farlow, purchased a small property in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana after his grandfather's death. His paternal grandparents, Annie Williams Robinson and Shelvin Robinson, Sr., did not own land, but were relatively wealthy in the community of Raceland, Louisiana. Along with Robinson's father, they worked on the farm of Harvey Peltier, Sr., a wealthy landowner. Robinson was close to his paternal grandparents, and often discussed current events with his grandfather. He once borrowed money from them while in college, which upset his father. Robinson's father was otherwise supportive of his education, and obtained a loan for tuition from his employer. Robinson grew up with three siblings, each of whom had significant health problems. Robinson attended Pitman Elementary School at the Third Zion Baptist Church in Raceland, until the school was consolidated with Kent Hadley Elementary and Junior High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Harry Robinson, Jr. attended Pitman Elementary School at his father's church, the Third Zion Baptist Church in Raceland, Louisiana. The school had no running water, and class was canceled when the church was in use during funerals. When Robinson was in the fourth grade, the school merged with Kent Hadley Elementary and Junior High School. Around this time, his mother lived with his maternal grandparents, and worked with them on the Godchaux sugar plantation. During the holidays, Robinson and his siblings visited his grandparents' home, where they ate his mother's gumbo and received gifts from the Godchaux family. Robinson's family later returned to Harvey Peltier, Sr.'s plantation, where his father worked. During this time, they obtained their first television. When he reached the eighth grade, Robinson moved to Thibodaux, Louisiana, and attended C.M. Washington High School, where he was mentored by the principal. The school had a football stadium, and jazz singer Germaine Bazzle led the band.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

Harry Robinson, Jr. admired his principal at Kent Hadley Elementary and Junior High School in Raceland, Louisiana, as well as his industrial arts teacher, Mr. Robert Bell, Sr. Robinson planned to study the industrial arts, and enrolled at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1959. He participated in student sit-ins, and remembers when the president, Felton G. Clark, closed the

school in response. After graduating in 1964, Robinson earned a master's degree in library science at Atlanta University, and then obtained a position at Kentucky State College in Frankfort, Kentucky. In 1966, Robinson returned to Southern University to work, but soon was accepted to attend University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In 1968, he met Ralph Bunche at Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral at Atlanta University. Then, Robinson worked at Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and Alabama State University, before becoming a museum director at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Harry Robinson, Jr. was exempt from serving in the Vietnam War due to his poor health. Although he opposed the war, he greatly admired President Lyndon Baines Johnson. Robinson married his first wife while attending the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, but was divorced by the time he met his second wife at Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. During his tenure there, Robinson acquired the papers of SCLC cofounder Ralph Abernathy by convincing the university president to award Abernathy an honorary degree. However, the president also decided to honor George Wallace as a reprisal, and Robinson had little power to stop it. He went on to work with librarian Dorothy Wesley Porter to secure President Harper Council Trenholm, Sr.'s papers, and hosted Bishop Joseph Howze of Biloxi, Mississippi at the school. In 1974, Robinson accepted a position at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas, and began developing the Museum of African-American Life and Culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry Robinson, Jr., Section A2006\_089\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:28 ?

Harry Robinson, Jr. initially housed the Museum of African-American Life and Culture at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas, but moved the museum after discovering structural problems in the building on campus. In 1979, the museum became independent, and Robinson began raising funds for a new location. He worked with the public and the City of Dallas, and received a large donation from The Meadows Foundation to open the museum in Dallas' Fair Park, at the former site of the Hall of Negro Life. Robinson describes the value of the museum to the African American community of Dallas, as evidenced by its strong base of independent donors. Like many cultural museums, the African American Museum in Dallas relied heavily on private donations. Robinson describes his hopes for the institution and his upcoming projects, including a learning center focused on African American inventors, scientists and designers; and the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame. Robinson concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life.