

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marcus McCraven

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | McCraven, Marcus, 1923-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | March 9, 2013  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2013   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:19:37).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Electrical engineer Marcus McCraven (1923 - 2021) is an electrical engineer who worked to develop the hydrogen bomb at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. McCraven was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 9, 2013, in Hamden, Connecticut. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2013_069  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Electrical engineer Marcus R. McCraven was born on December 27, 1923 in Des Moines, Iowa to parents Marcus and Buena McCraven. After graduating from high school, McCraven enrolled at Howard University but was drafted into the U.S. Army during his first year of college. He was listed as an expert rifleman but went on to serve as a supply clerk with an engineering regiment in Papua, New Guinea and in the Philippines. Returning to the United States, McCraven continued his studies at Howard University and graduated with his B.S. degree in electrical engineering.

Upon graduation, McCraven was hired at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C. After six months, he was promoted to electrical engineer and became the project leader of the Nuclear Systems Branch. McCraven soon moved to Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California where he worked on the hydrogen bomb. His area of expertise on the project was diagnostics and he was instrumental the early development of nuclear weapons, including nuclear tests on Bikini Island and in Nevada. McCraven then joined the research staff at the California Lawrence Radiation Laboratory; and, in the 1960s, he left California and moved to Connecticut where he began to work for Phelps Dodge. In 1970, he joined United Illuminating Co. as the director of environmental engineering and was later promoted to vice president.

McCraven has also served as trustee at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut. In 2011, McCraven received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters degree from Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut.

McCraven lived in Hamden, Connecticut with his wife, Marguerite McCraven, a former social worker in the Hamden Public Schools. They have three children: Paul McCraven, the vice president of community development at New Alliance Bank; Stephen McCraven, a musician living in Paris, Carol McCraven.

Marcus McCraven was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 8, 2013.

McCraven passed away on May 5, 2021.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marcus McCraven was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 9, 2013, in Hamden, Connecticut, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Electrical engineer Marcus McCraven (1923 - 2021) is an electrical engineer who worked to develop the hydrogen bomb at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

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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:

McCraven, Marcus, 1923-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McCraven, Marcus, 1923- --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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Lawrence Livermore Laboratory

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### Occupations:

Electrical Engineer

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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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 Marcus McCraven, March 9, 2013. 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 Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:03  
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Marcus McCraven shares the story behind his last name. His paternal great-

great-grandfather, Mac Craven, moved from Kentucky to Iowa and when he registered the clerk wrote his name as McCraven. McCraven was born December 27, 1923 in Des Moines, Iowa. His mother, Buena Vista Rollins, was born in 1900 in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Her relatives were involved in the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company and her sister's husband owned a shoe shop in Port Gibson. McCraven's mother graduated from Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi before moving to Iowa. His father, Marcus Harry McCraven, was born in Des Moines in 1901, the son of a Pullman porter. McCraven's mother was a maid and his father was a printer for the owner of 'Better Homes and Gardens.' Though they lived during the Great Depression, McCraven's family never went hungry and owned a home and car.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:43  
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Marcus McCraven talks about his father, Marcus Harry McCraven, a Prince Hall Mason who worked as a printer for 'Better Homes and Gardens.' McCraven's mother, Buena Vista McCrave, met his father when she went to Des Moines, Iowa for her education. They married in the early 1920s and had McCraven and his younger brother, Carl Clarke McCraven. As a child, McCraven was interested in sports and acting as well as taking things apart and fixing things. His parents divorced after junior high school and McCraven moved to Port Gibson, Mississippi. McCraven talks about the math and science courses he took in junior high and high school. His mother moved to Washington D.C. when McCraven decided to attend Howard University. McCraven remembers how his interest in the construction sites managed by a relative influenced his interest in engineering.

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Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:27  
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Marcus McCraven talks about living with his aunt while attending high school in Vicksburg, Mississippi. He attended Magnolia High School until the eleventh grade and then graduated from Port Gibson High School. His mother, Buena Vista Rollins, then moved to Washington, D.C. so that McCraven could attend Howard University in 1942. During his freshman year, McCraven was drafted into the Army because of World War II. He was sent to Papau, New Guinea, where he served in the Army Engineers. Though McCraven was an expert rifleman in a combat zone, he received no bullets for his guns throughout the war. McCraven talks about segregation in the Army and in Washington, D.C. He left the Army in 1946 and graduated from Howard University in 1949. McCraven talks about his time at Howard University and the difficulty he had finding a job as an engineer after his graduation.

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Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:55  
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Marcus McCraven describes how he met his wife, Marguerite, while at Howard University in Washington, D.C. After graduating from Howard University in 1949, McCraven started working at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory. At the Naval Research Laboratory McCraven patented a high current photodiode for use in the testing of nuclear devices. Six months later McCraven moved to Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, California, where he designed the digital diagnostic system for gathering data during nuclear tests. McCraven was on the team that armed the first hydrogen bomb and was present at Operation Castle Bravo, the first test of the hydrogen bomb in Bikini Atoll.

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Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:42  
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Marcus McCraven describes nuclear tests and the research they conduct at the test sites. In 1961, McCraven was involved with nuclear tests as part of Operation Plowshare, which was examining peaceful uses of nuclear weapons. He was recruited by the Phelps Dodge Corporation, which was planning to become involved in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Though that venture never materialized, Phelps Dodge kept McCraven as chief engineer, where he worked on coaxial cable assembly. He moved to the United Illuminating Company, a company in 1970 as the director of environmental engineering. McCraven talks about the politics surrounding nuclear weapons and describes his time in Aldermaston, United Kingdom, where he evaluated nuclear instruments to be sent to the United States.

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Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:07  
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Marcus McCraven describes his time at United Illuminating Company (UI), where he was recruited in 1970. He served as the vice president of environmental engineering, helping UI to follow government regulations and build a low-sulfur coal burning plant in Connecticut. McCraven was also a charter member of the advisory committee for establishing the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, McCraven was involved in the Yale Peabody Museum and the Red Cross. McCraven talks about the painter Rudolph Zallinger as well as Carlton Highsmith and Bill Strickland, who developed training programs for low-performing students in New Haven, Connecticut.

McCraven also talks about his wife, Marguerite, his children, and his grandchildren.

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Video Oral History Interview with Marcus McCraven, Section A2013\_069\_001\_007, TRT: 7:24:40 ?

Marcus McCraven talks about his travels, including a trip to Italy where he met the first African Cardinal. McCraven shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects on his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. Towards the end of the interview, McCraven describes his photographs.

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