

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Carl Ray

PERSON

Ray, Carl, 1944-2014

**Alternative Names:** Carl Ray;

**Life Dates:** August 30, 1944-September 17, 2014

**Place of Birth:** Butler, Alabama, USA

**Residence:** San Jose, CA

**Occupations:** Civil Rights Activist;

## Biographical Note

An engineer turned entertainer, educator, mentor and activist, Carl F. Ray was born on August 30, 1944, in Butler, Alabama, to Vidella and George Ray. In 1962, tragedy struck his life when a white man killed his father, George, because Ray did not call the man "sir." Consumed by anger and guilt, Ray suffered from depression and nervous breakdowns. Ray persevered and graduated from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1967 with a B.S. in electrical engineering.

For years Ray worked as an engineer before deciding in 1976 to try his luck as a standup comic. To support himself, Ray drove a taxi. It was a rider in his cab who made him see the value of forgiveness and acceptance. By 1989, he was host and producer of his own cable television comedy show. In 1990, he began to work also as a motivational speaker, which led Ray to write and perform a one-man play, A Killing in Chocktaw, dealing with the years following the tragedy of his father's death. This play was turned into a documentary in 2004.

Since 1988, Ray and his wife, Brenda, ran Courtland Esteem School from their home in San Jose, California, where they taught African American youth in first through sixth grades. Concerned about young black students attending college, Ray escorted teams of youth on college tours. More than 1,200 students have participated in these tours. Ray received commendations for his work from Congressman Norman Mineta, Santa Clara County Supervisor Blanca Alvarado and other government officials. CityFlight recognized Ray as one of the "10 Most Influential African Americans in the Bay Area."

Ray passed away on September 17, 2014 at the age of 70.

Carl Ray was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 28, 2002.

## Related Entries

**Tuskegee University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.S.**

**Rosenwald High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Diploma**

**Butler Public Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Delete** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Lockheed Martin** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1967 to 1976]

**Courtland Esteem School** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board of Directors**