

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps

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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>	Epps, Roselyn Payne
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 16, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:07:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Pediatrician Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps (1930 - 2014 ) was Professor Emerita of Pediatrics at Howard University. Epps was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 16, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_047
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps was born in Little Rock, Arkansas. Both of her parents were educators, as were her grandparents. Epps attended elementary school at Powell Laboratory School in Savannah, Georgia, and afterwards attended Palmer Memorial High School in Sedalia, North Carolina, before enrolling at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She graduated with a B.S. in 1951, and obtained an M.S., also from Howard, in 1955.

Upon receiving her M.S., Epps became a rotating intern with the United States Public Health Service at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington (later renamed Howard University Hospital). In 1956, she began a pediatric residency with the hospital, and two years later became its chief resident.

In 1961, she became a medical officer with the District of Columbia Department of Health, and in 1973 earned an M.Ph. from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. She continued on with the District of Columbia Department of Health, and in 1980 was appointed the first acting commissioner of health of the District of Columbia.

That year also saw her become a professor of pediatrics and children's health at Howard, and a year later, she received an M.A. from American University in Washington, D.C. She would go on to become the chief of the Child Development Division and director of the Child Development Center at Howard. Among her accomplishments during her time there were overseeing a program that aided disabled children and their parents, and she was the founder of the High Risk Young People's Project, which brought together several university health science departments, community organizations, and government agencies within the district. In 1988, she went to work for the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. Semi-retired since 1998, she serves as a consultant for the public and private sector. Epps has written more than ninety articles for medical publications, was a co-editor for *The Women's Complete Handbook*, and was the first African American and female president of the District of Columbia chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She has been involved in various professional and philanthropic undertakings and is the recipient of more than sixty awards. The Council of the District of Columbia declared February 14, 1981, *Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps Day* in Washington, D.C.

Epps passed away on September 30, 2014, at the age of 83. She was married to Dr. Charles H. Epps, Jr. and they have four children.

Roselyn Payne Epps was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 16, 2003.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 16, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pediatrician Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps (1930 - 2014 ) was Professor Emerita of Pediatrics at Howard 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

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:

Epps, Roselyn Payne

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Epps, Roselyn Payne--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:

Pediatrician

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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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 Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, March 16, 2003. 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 Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Roselyn Epps was born on December 11, 1930 to Mattie Beverly Payne and Dr. William Kenneth Payne. Epps' maternal grandfather, John W. Beverly

graduated from Brown University in 1894. He was the first black teacher and the first black president at Alabama State College. One of his three self-published books chronicled the history of African Americans in Alabama. Epps' maternal grandmother, Mattie Dale Beverly was a descendent of Governor Thomas Dale of Virginia. The Beverlys were educated by the American Missionary Association. Her brother, Ellis Dale, was the first black physician in Cleveland, Ohio. Epps' paternal grandfather, Reverend Robert Payne was a teacher, minister, and farmer. Her paternal grandmother, Mary Payne, was a teacher and homemaker. All of Epps' grandparents were college educated. Epps' father graduated from Morehouse College and met Epps' mother at Alabama State College where they both taught. The family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas and then to Savannah, Georgia where her parents taught at Savannah State University.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Roselyn Epps spent her childhood years on the campus of Savannah State University in Savannah, Georgia where both her parents taught. After Epps' father, Dr. William Kenneth Epps, became a dean at the university, her mother left the school to avoid nepotism. She became an elementary school principal and Epps' father became the president of Savannah State University. Epps was home schooled until she enrolled at Powell Laboratory School on the Savannah State campus. A quiet child, Epps was an avid reader and dreamt of becoming a pediatrician. In high school, Epps and her brother attended Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina, a boarding school for African Americans. She reflects upon her formative experience at Palmer and describes the school's history and its founder, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown. Nat King Cole once performed at Palmer while on a visit with Maria Cole, Dr. Brown's niece. Epps names other black boarding schools including the Mary Potter School, Mather Academy, and Piney Woods Country Life School. Like Palmer, they all suffered after integration. After her mother passed away, Epps took her mother's card-playing club on a tour of Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Roselyn Epps spent her childhood summers at 4-H camps and taking dance lessons at Savannah State University in Savannah, Georgia where her father, Dr. William Kenneth Epps, was dean and later became the university's president. Epps describes his role as an academic administrator and how he resolved an issue of student crime at the campus post office. Her husband, HistoryMaker Dr. Charles H. Epps, also an academic administrator, was the Vice President for Health Affairs at Howard University in Washington, D.C. After Epps graduated from Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina in 1947, she decided to attend Howard University at her parents' recommendation. At Howard, Epps was one of the few women who pursued the pre-med track despite being discouraged by many people. Epps talks about her experience at Howard where she met her husband. The faculty at Howard during Epps' college years included university president Mordecai Johnson, Alain LeRoy Locke, Frank Snowden, Lois Mailou Jones and HistoryMaker Lloyd N. Ferguson. After graduating in 1951, Epps continued her studies at Howard University College of Medicine.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Roselyn Epps describes her experience at Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C. She recalls an embarrassing experience in her

neuroanatomy laboratory class with Dr. Moses Wharton Young, and her admiration of faculty women like Drs. Blanche Bourne and Ruth Ella Moore. Epps' mentor at Howard was Dr. Roland Scott, the chairman of the pediatrics department, renowned for his research on sickle cell disease. Epps names prominent children's health issues during the 1960s and 70s, and emphasizes the importance of immunizations. After graduating from Howard University College of Medicine in 1955, Epps worked at Freedman's Hospital, until her husband, HistoryMaker Dr. Charles H. Epps, was appointed the hospital's chief of orthopedics. She describes the history and operation of Freedmen's Hospital and the impact of urban migration in Washington, D.C. To avoid nepotism after her husband's appointment, Epps went to work at the D.C. Department of Public Health in 1961. While there, she pursued an M.P.H. degree at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, graduating in 1973.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Roselyn Epps worked closely with mentor Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee while a student at Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C. from 1951 to 1955. Dr. Ferebee's medical activism inspired Epps to start a local chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics with a group of Howard seniors. Epps would later integrate the D.C. Chapter of the Academy. While at Freedman's Hospital from 1955 to 1960, Epps worked with distinguished colleagues like Richard Scher, Manuel Lorenzo Walker, Reginald Bennett, Lawrence Dunmore, and her husband, HistoryMaker Dr. Charles H. Epps. Epps details her community involvement and her dedication to Children International. Near the end of her time at the D.C. Department of Public Health (1961-1980), Epps became Acting Commissioner of Health; she also pursued a degree in public administration and higher education at American University. Epps talks about medical ethics, the evolution of public health and shifts in national attitudes toward disabilities. She also talks about the Great Society programs and one of its casualties, D.C. orphanage Junior Village.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Roselyn Epps talks about her leadership of the High Risk Young People's Project while working as the director of the Child Development Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C. from 1980 to 1988. As the project's director, Epps coordinated community-based programming to serve the needs of youth in the city. In 1988, Epps left her post at Howard for the National Institutes of Health [NIH] where she implemented a smoking cessation program developed by the National Cancer Institute by using the train-the-trainer model. Epps then lobbied the Academy of Pediatrics to focus on smoking cessation during childhood. Epps describes the expansion of pediatric medicine and changes in the field over time. Epps also talks about chronic pediatric issues, hypertension in children, and advances in cancer research as well as the rising incidence of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Epps is very proud of her work on "The Women's Complete Health" (1996), co-edited with Susan Stewart. The book is a compilation of excerpts written by preeminent experts on women's health.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Roselyn Epps identifies current gaps in the state of children's healthcare, emphasizing the need to prioritize the needs of children in the United States. While working with the Hospital for Sick Children, Epps rose from the position

of volunteer to president of the board. Epps remembers the challenges of fundraising for the hospital's building campaign. Epps was also the chair of the national board of Girls Inc. She talks about the organization's name change, its innovative programming for girls and her own role. During her tenure, Epps hired Isabel Stewart who became the organization's National Executive Director. Epps then reflects upon her work ethic and the lessons she learned about leadership as a medical professional and civic leader. Epps also describes her interactions with Joycelyn Elders, the former Surgeon General of the United States, and HistoryMaker Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_008, TRT: 0:30:23 ?

Roselyn Epps describes meeting and watching distinguished African Americans like Philippa Schuyler, Roland Hayes, Charles Drew, George Washington Carver, and Mordecai Johnson as a young girl. During her childhood, Epps' family traveled by car to avoid being subjected to segregation on public transportation. Epps talks about the importance of integration as well as its consequences on African American education. Highly educated teachers who believed in the learning capacity of African American children were often sent to majority schools during post-integration. She shares her advice for aspiring medical professionals and talks about the importance of historically black colleges and universities like her alma mater Howard University, in Washington, D.C. Epps reflects on how she would like to be remembered. She also narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Roselyn Payne Epps, Section A2003\_047\_001\_009, TRT: 0:06:43 ?

Roselyn Epps continues to narrate her photographs.