

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert P. Madison

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Madison, Robert P., 1923-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison,
Dates:	March 17, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:37:03).
Abstract:	Architect Robert P. Madison (1923 -) was the founder of Robert P. Madison International, in Cleveland in 1954, the first African American architecture firm in Ohio, and only the ninth in the country at that time. Madison was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 17, 2004, in Cleveland, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_026
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Architect and entrepreneur Robert P. Madison was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1923. He graduated from Cleveland's East Technical High School with honors in mathematics and science in 1940. He attended the School of Architecture at Howard University, but left to serve in World War II as a second lieutenant. He was wounded in action in the Italian Campaign, receiving the Purple Heart and three combat ribbons. He received a B.A. in architecture from Case Western Reserve University, an M.A. in architecture degree from Harvard University, and completed additional studies as a Fulbright Scholar at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, France in urban design and prestressed concrete.

Madison served as an assistant professor of architecture at Howard University until he opened his office, Robert P. Madison International, in Cleveland in 1954, the first such office in Ohio opened by an African American architect and only the ninth in the country. Major building projects for the firm have included the United States Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, the Nuclear Facility at Tuskegee Institute (Alabama), and the Cleveland Browns Stadium.

His professional affiliations include the American Institute of Architects, Cleveland Chapter, the Architects Society of Ohio and the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. He is the recipient of numerous honors, including an honorary Doctor of Humanities from Howard University (1987), the Cleveland Arts Prize (2000), the American Institute of Architects Ohio Gold Medal Firm Award (1994) and induction into the Northeast Ohio Business Hall of Fame.

Madison is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, Sigma Pi Phi and Epsilon Delta Rho Fraternities.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert P. Madison was conducted by Regennia Williams on March 17, 2004, in Cleveland, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Architect Robert P. Madison (1923 -) was the founder of Robert P. Madison International, in Cleveland in 1954, the first African American architecture firm in Ohio, and only the ninth in the country at that time.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Madison, Robert P., 1923-

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Madison, Robert P., 1923---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Architect

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Robert P. Madison, March 17, 2004. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_001, TRT: 0:29:09 ?

Robert P. Madison was born on July 28, 1923 in Cleveland, Ohio. His mother, Nettie Brown Madison, was born in Selma, Alabama. She was an alumna of Morris Brown College in Atlanta, had a strong religious faith, and encouraged her sons to study architecture and engineering. His father, Robert J. Madison, was born in Mobile, Alabama and was an alumnus of Snow Hill Institute in Alabama as well as Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he studied civil engineering. Madison's father taught at Selma University and Benedict College, and worked for the U.S. Department of War, but left D.C. for Cleveland so his sons could attend East Technical High School and live near

their maternal grandparents in the Central neighborhood. In the Great Depression, Madison's father could not find engineering work and had to take jobs as a cab driver and a caddie. At East Tech, a selective public school, Madison studied architectural drawing and graduated in 1940. He received a scholarship to attend Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_002, TRT: 0:28:38
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Robert P. Madison began studying architecture at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1940. With no out-of-state aid, he was poor as a student. Madison was a part of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, so after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he left school for military service. He entered the U.S. Army as a private first class in 1943 and became a second lieutenant in 1944. Madison served as a battalion intelligence officer in the 92nd Infantry Division during the Rome-Arno Campaign, where he was wounded and received a Purple Heart. His division was composed of blacks at the rank of captain and below, but commanded by whites, often those who had been cast off from other units. After initially being rejected by his future wife, Madison dated Coretta Scott for two years when he returned from World War II. Madison shares his thoughts about deploying the atomic bomb against Japan's civilian population. He also describes the confidence that led African American soldiers to battle discrimination at home.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_003, TRT: 0:28:14
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Robert P. Madison returned to Cleveland, Ohio in 1946 after serving in World War II. He planned to use the G.I. Bill to attend Western Reserve University in Cleveland, but was rejected by the dean of architecture due to his race. Madison won admittance by taking his case to the dean of admissions and passing several tests. He graduated with a degree in architecture in 1948, but had trouble finding work due to racial discrimination. Madison worked for a former professor's firm until 1950, when he left to study at Harvard University. In 1949, he married HistoryMaker Leatrice Branch Madison, whom he had met while studying at Howard University. After graduating Harvard in 1952, Madison studied at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, France on a Fulbright fellowship. In 1953, he returned to Howard as professor of architecture, but left in 1954 to start his own firm, originally named Robert P. Madison, Architect. He became the first African American to join the Case Western Reserve University Board of Trustees.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_004, TRT: 0:29:01
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Robert P. Madison started his architectural firm as Robert P. Madison, Architect in 1954, and was later joined by his brothers Julian and Bernard. Originally, the firm worked with black clients on churches and offices and with the government on housing projects. In 1965, Madison's firm designed Captain Arthur Roth Elementary School in Cleveland, even though he joined the NAACP in protesting its construction as it fostered racial isolation. During a similar protest in 1964, Reverend Bruce Klunder was killed. Madison and his wife HistoryMaker Leatrice Branch Madison had two daughters. Madison interceded with Cleveland Public Schools to move their oldest from a half-day school program to an advanced class until the family moved to Cleveland Heights. In 1983, Madison split the firm between himself and Julian Madison, keeping offices in Cleveland and Atlanta. He talks about his membership in Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and Sigma Pi Phi, and his longstanding membership at St. John

A.M.E. Church in Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_005, TRT: 0:29:54
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Robert P. Madison advised Carl Burton Stokes on urban renewal issues during Stokes's successful 1967 mayoral campaign in Cleveland, Ohio. Stokes, one of many African American mayors elected in that era, led efforts to open up public contracts to the African American community but faced criticism when funds from his Cleveland: Now! program were used to buy guns. Madison lauds the achievements of the Black Power Movement in increasing equality of opportunity, but worries it may lead to entitlement and isolation. He comments on obstacles faced by black-owned firms due to integration and the decline of the public housing projects in recent decades, when buildings like Cabrini-Green Homes in Chicago were replaced but not improved. Madison is on the board of trustees for the Cleveland Orchestra, where he wants to recruit more black musicians, and Cleveland Opera, since he came to love opera while in Italy during World War II. He describes plans to win more private contracts for Robert P. Madison International.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert P. Madison, Section A2004_026_001_006, TRT: 0:12:07
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Robert P. Madison narrates his photographs.