

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reginald Thomas

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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>	Thomas, Reginald, 1957-2018
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Thomas,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 27, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:14:56).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fashion designer Reginald Thomas (1957 - 2018 ) was the creator of Reginald Designs. As a key figure in the Chicago fashion scene, he was known for incorporating African themes into his influential designs. Thomas was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 27, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_111
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fashion designer Reginald Thomas was born in Lake Wales, Florida, on October 21, 1957. As a child, Thomas enjoyed drawing, especially the faces of women. In kindergarten, he was often punished because he would draw rather than do his lessons. Following the deaths of his mother at age five and his father when he was nine, Thomas was sent to Chicago to live with his oldest sister, and there his artistic talents blossomed.

With his sister's approval, Thomas would often find clothes that had been thrown away by others, and he would refashion them into new articles of clothing as presents. At thirteen, he was given a sewing machine for Christmas, and he spent long hours sewing in the closet of his home. While in high school, Thomas designed prom dresses for his classmates. After high school, Thomas attended Northern Illinois University, hoping to become a special education teacher, but following a successful fashion show, he transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago. There, he held his second show, and sold his collection to Chicago boutique Fiorucci. Thomas graduated from the Art Institute in 1983, and the following year, his signature line, Reginald Designs, was born.

Since then, Thomas has been a key figure in the Chicago fashion scene, consistently taking part in the Red Hot Chicago! fashion show. His designs are known for their clean lines, flowing fabrics, interchangeable pieces and comfort, and he takes pride in ensuring that his work is available to all, regardless of size or physical handicap. Thomas credits much of his success to encouragement from family and friends, including Joan and George Johnson and Leigh Jones.

Thomas passed away on June 25, 2018.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reginald Thomas was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 27, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fashion designer Reginald Thomas (1957 - 2018 ) was the creator of Reginald Designs. As a key figure in the Chicago fashion scene, he was known for incorporating African themes into his influential designs.

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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:

Thomas, Reginald, 1957-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Thomas, Reginald, 1957-2018--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:

Fashion Designer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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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 Reginald Thomas, July 27, 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).

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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 Reginald Thomas, Section A2004\_111\_001\_001, TRT: 0:27:40  
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Fashion designer Reginald Thomas describes his mother's and father's backgrounds and details his childhood growing up in central Florida. Thomas shares some of his earliest memories and recalls becoming interested in drawing at a very early age. Thomas describes his childhood personality and explains his early interest in clothing and fashion, partly derived from church on Sunday and his sisters' doll collection.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Thomas, Section A2004\_111\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:36  
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Fashion designer Reginald Thomas discusses the deaths of his parents and how

he was subsequently raised by his oldest sister and her husband, who moved the family to the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago. Thomas describes the racial and class differences between Chicago and Florida and talks about how he adjusted. Thomas recalls his school years, discussing his burgeoning creativity and explaining how he was sometimes stifled. Thomas explains that his artistry eventually paid off in high school, when he became an award-winning photographer. Thomas then explains his decision to attend Northern Illinois University.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Thomas, Section A2004\_111\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:00  
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Fashion designer Reginald Thomas discusses his schooling at Northern Illinois University and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he put on his first fashion shows and developed his sense of fashion design. Thomas names some influential teachers who helped get him started. Thomas also talks about starting his fashion business, Reginald Designs, and explains some of the early hardships of his business.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Thomas, Section A2004\_111\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:10  
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Fashion designer Reginald Thomas details his design process and design technique, as well as sharing some of his philosophies about fashion. Thomas discusses fashion history, compares American fashion with European fashion, and explains why African American fashion has a unique place in the design world. Thomas also talks about some of his famous clientele and shares an example of one of his most controversial designs.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Thomas, Section A2004\_111\_001\_005, TRT: 0:18:30  
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Fashion designer Reginald Thomas reflects on his artistic gifts, his life, his family, and his career. Thomas counts himself as fortunate to have been able to make a living from his art, and reflects on his mother and father, who never got to see his success.