

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Curry

---

## 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>	Curry, George E.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Curry,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 27, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:25:20).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Syndicated columnist and newspaper editor George Curry (1947 - 2016 ) served as editor-in-chief of Emerge Magazine until it stopped publishing in 2000. Curry later became editor-in-chief for the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. Curry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 27, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_182
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

George Edward Curry was born on February 23, 1947, in Tuscaloosa, Alabama; his mother worked as a domestic and his father was a mechanic. Curry's father abandoned the family when Curry was just seven years old, leaving him to step into the role of the man of the house, assisting his mother in raising his three younger sisters. In 1965, Curry earned his high school diploma from Druid High School, where he was a member of the football team and sports editor of the school newspaper.

In 1966, Curry moved to New York where he worked for The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) for a year. He went on to study at Knoxville College in Tennessee. Fulfilling a lifelong dream, Curry began his professional journalism career as a reporter for *Sports Illustrated* magazine in 1970; he was the second African American hired by the publication.

After leaving *Sports Illustrated* in 1972, Curry headed west and worked as a beat reporter for *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* until 1983. In 1977, he founded the St. Louis Minority Journalism Workshop, a training program for aspiring high school journalists; that same year, he wrote his first book *Jake Gaither: America's Most Famous Black Coach*. From 1983 until 1989, Curry worked for the *Chicago Tribune* as a Washington Correspondent, covering political stories such as Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign. From 1989 until 1993, Curry worked as the New York bureau chief of the *Tribune*. From there, Curry served as editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine until it folded and printed its final edition in 2000; under his leadership the magazine won more than forty national journalism awards.

In 2001, Curry became editor-in-chief for the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service, or NNPA, and BlackPressUSA.com; his weekly syndicated column appeared in more than two hundred African American newspapers. While at NNPA, Curry's work has included covering the Supreme Court's decision on the

University of Michigan's affirmative action case and America's war with Iraq.

In 2003, Curry was named Journalist of the Year by the National Association of Black Journalists; he is also on NABJ's list of *Most Influential Black Journalists of the 20th Century*.

George Curry was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 27, 2004.

Curry passed away on August 22, 2016.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Curry was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on September 27, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Syndicated columnist and newspaper editor George Curry (1947 - 2016 ) served as editor-in-chief of Emerge Magazine until it stopped publishing in 2000. Curry later became editor-in-chief for the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

---

## 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:

Curry, George E.

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Curry, George E.--Interviews

---

African American authors--Interviews

---

African Americans in the newspaper industry--Interviews

---

African American journalists--Interviews

---

African American newspaper editors--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Newspaper Editor

---

Syndicated Columnist

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

---

## 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 George Curry, September 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).

---

## 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 George Curry, Section A2004\_182\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

George Curry was born on February 23, 1947 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. His mother, Martha Lee Brownlee, was born in Greensboro, Alabama around 1929 and worked as a domestic. Her mother, Sylvia Harris, was part Indian and was born on August 23, 1900. Curry's father, Homer Lee Curry, was born to Joe Curry and Liza Curry in Reform, Alabama and was mechanic who had been in the U.S. Air Force. He was also an alcoholic and left the family when Curry was around eight years old. Curry has three younger sisters: Charlotte Ann Purvis, Sylvia Christine Polk, and Susan Carol Gandy. He was raised in an area of Tuscaloosa known as "The Bottom" until his family moved into the McKenzie Court housing projects when he was in about seventh grade. Curry was inspired by the head of the housing projects, Robert Glynn, to join the Benjamin Barnes Branch of the YMCA and to attend college. He was also encouraged by his high school principal, Macdonald Hughes, who brought successful alumni back to school for a motivational career day.

African American authors--Interviews.

African Americans in the newspaper industry--Interviews.

African American journalists--Interviews.

African American newspaper editors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with George Curry, Section A2004\_182\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

George Curry recalls his childhood playing basketball with his cousins in Reform, Alabama on the land that his grandfather, Joe Curry, owned. He attended Central Elementary School and 32nd Avenue Elementary School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and recalls his first grade teacher, Johnnie Anderson Giglio. Curry's stepfather was William Henry Polk, who drove a dump truck at the University of Alabama and would bring books home from campus. Curry recalls his stepfather reading the Pittsburgh Courier and leading family discussions about the news. Curry was a mischievous child and saw education as a way to get out of the South. He recalls the racism in Alabama, including segregated busses and drinking fountains, as well as protesting the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Curry attended Druid High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and decided in eighth grade that he wanted to be a journalist. He was the sports editor for his high school newspaper, the Dragon's Tale.

Video Oral History Interview with George Curry, Section A2004\_182\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

George Curry became interested in the Civil Rights Movement while attending Druid High School in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and met Reverend Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. around 1963. Curry attended Weeping Mary Baptist Church and Elizabeth Baptist Church. During high school, Curry raised money for college by washing dishes at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Curry graduated from high school in 1965 and enrolled at the University of Alabama for a year before transferring to Knoxville College in Knoxville, Tennessee. In the summer of 1966, Curry worked with HistoryMaker Julian Bond in the communication department of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Atlanta, Georgia. At Knoxville College, Curry was quarterback of the football team, editor of the paper, and an associate member on the Board of Trustees. In 1970, Curry graduated from Knoxville College and began writing for Sports Illustrated. In 1972, he became a writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with George Curry, Section A2004\_182\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

George Curry wrote for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch from 1972 until 1983. In 1977, he founded the St. Louis Minority Journalism Workshop with the Greater St. Louis Association of Black Journalists, including Gerald Boyd and Sheila Rule. In 1983, Curry began writing for the Chicago Tribune, where he covered the 1984 presidential campaign of HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. From 1984 to 1989, Curry worked as a Washington, D.C. correspondent, and from 1989 until 1993, he worked as a New York bureau chief. In 1993, Curry became editor-in-chief of Emerge, a black news magazine launched by Wilmer Ames and owned by Robert L. Johnson, the founder of BET. He recalls stories published in Emerge including HistoryMaker Reginald Stuart's feature on Kemba Smith and Lori S. Robinson's story on "Rape of a Spelman Coed." Curry received notoriety for covers depicting U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. In 2000, Emerge was shut down and given to HistoryMaker Keith Clinkscales, who replaced it with Savoy magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with George Curry, Section A2004\_182\_001\_005, TRT: 0:24:50 ?

George Curry reflects on his experience at 'Emerge' magazine, his plans to revive it, and the collection of essays he edited, "The Best of Emerge Magazine." In 2003, Curry became editor-in-chief for the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service (NNPA), which functions like the Associated Press for black newspapers. He reflects on his choice of career and shares his advice for young African American journalists. Curry also reflects on his legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He ends the interview by narrating his photographs.