

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jay Harris

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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>	Harris, Jay, 1948-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jay Harris,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 7, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:12:29).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper publishing chief executive Jay Harris (1948 - ) was the chairman and publisher of the San Jose Mercury News from 1994 until 2001. He held the Wallis Annenberg Chair in Journalism and Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication. He was also the founding director of The Center for the Study of Journalism and Democracy. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2005, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_235
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Communications professor and newspaper publishing chief executive Jay Harris was born December 3, 1948, in Washington, D.C. to Margaret Estelle Burr Harris and Richard James Harris. Harris attended Santa Clara University in California.

In 1970, Harris began working at "The New Journal" in Wilmington, Delaware as an editor and reporter. Harris worked for Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism as a professor and assistant dean from 1975-1982. While working for Northwestern University, Harris initiated the American Society of Newspaper Editors' national census of minority employment. Through the initiation of this census Harris earned a position on the *National Association of Black Journalists'* list of the 100 Most Influential Black Journalists of the 20th Century. In 1982, Harris became a correspondent and columnist for the Gannett News Service and in 1985, he became the executive editor for the *Philadelphia Daily News* under Knight Ridder, Inc. Three years later, Harris was promoted to the corporate staff of Knight Ridder's Newspaper Division, where he served as assistant to the president; by 1990, he had become Vice President of Operations. Harris became chairman and publisher of the *SJ Mercury News* in 1994, and ran the *Mercury News* from 1994 until 2001. His accomplishments during his tenure at the newspaper include the launching of *Nuevo Mundo* and *Viet Mercury*, which are Spanish and Vietnamese versions of *Mercury News*. In addition, Harris worked to diversify the staff to include 50 percent female employees and more than 30 percent ethnic minority employees.

After leaving *Mercury News*, Harris joined the faculty of the University of Southern California in October of 2002. At the University of Southern California, Harris held the Wallis Annenberg Chair in Journalism and Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication and worked as the founding director of The Center for the Study of Journalism and Democracy. He also worked as the Presidential Professor at Santa Clara University

in Santa Clara, California.

Jay Harris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 7, 2005.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jay Harris was conducted by Paul Brock on October 7, 2005, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper publishing chief executive Jay Harris (1948 - ) was the chairman and publisher of the San Jose Mercury News from 1994 until 2001. He held the Wallis Annenberg Chair in Journalism and Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication. He was also the founding director of The Center for the Study of Journalism and Democracy.

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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:

Harris, Jay, 1948-

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Scott, Carolyn (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Harris, Jay, 1948- --Interviews

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African American journalists--Interviews

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University of Southern California--Faculty--Interviews

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African American executives--California--San Jose--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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San Jose Mercury-news

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## Occupations:

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Jay Harris, October 7, 2005. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jay Harris, Section A2005\_235\_001\_001, TRT: 0:20:47 ?

Jay Harris was born on December 3, 1948 in Washington, D.C. His mother, Margaret Burr Harris, was also born in D.C. Her maternal grandmother, a white woman, emigrated from Manchester, England to the U.S. She had several offspring with her black husband, some of whom chose to pass, though Harris's grandmother, Sarah Walker Burr, did not. Raised in Boston, Massachusetts, Walker Burr attended Boston Latin School, was an early supporter of the Urban League and the first black woman to work in the Massachusetts State House. Harris's maternal grandfather, John H. Burr, was from Springfield, Massachusetts. His family traced its lineage to Oneida ancestors and a former slave who joined St. John's Congregational Church upon arriving in Springfield. Burr graduated from Springfield College and taught at Howard University, where the gym was named in his honor for his development of the university's physical education program. Harris talks about his family's interactions with W.E.B. Du Bois and admiration of his work.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

African Americans--Genealogy.

African American mothers.

Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

Passing (Identity)--United States--Massachusetts.

African American churches--Massachusetts.

Howard University--Faculty.

Video Oral History Interview with Jay Harris, Section A2005\_235\_001\_002, TRT: 0:23:17 ?

Jay Harris talks about his maternal grandmother, Sarah Walker Burr. Born in Boston, Massachusetts to a black father and a white woman, she had several white half-siblings from her mother's first marriage and biracial siblings, some of whom chose to pass given the increasing segregation of the early 20th century. Due to her family's economic circumstances, Walker Burr lived in a tenement house in Boston. Despite these challenges, she graduated from Boston Latin School and worked for the Urban League in Springfield, Massachusetts with Dr. William N. DeBerry, founder of that city's chapter. In 1921, she married John Burr, and they moved to Washington, D.C. for his faculty position in Howard University's physical education department. Harris talks about his grandmother's civil rights work and her integral role in sustaining the family through the Great Depression. He also describes the correspondence she saved from one of her brothers who was a soldier in World War I.

African American families.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Miscegenation--United States--History.

Forten, Charlotte L.

Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

Migration, Internal--United States

Segregation--Massachusetts--Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Jay Harris, Section A2005\_235\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:25 ?

Jay Harris' mother, Margaret Burr Harris, and her one sister, Jonelle Burr Washington, were raised near Howard University in Washington, D.C. Both graduated from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and Howard. Harris' aunt taught math at MacFarland Middle School, and his mother was a social worker at Cedar Knoll Youth Detention Center in Laurel, Maryland. Harris' father, Richard Harris, was born in 1918 to an unwed young woman from a prominent black family. He was taken in by a devoutly religious family in Norfolk, Virginia, and his adoptive father worked as the head waiter on a steamship that traveled the Chesapeake River. Harris' father fought in World War II, attended Howard on the G.I. Bill, and spent time in nightclubs and with musicians such as Duke Ellington. He was employed with IBM until multiple sclerosis left him unable to work. While growing up in the Shaw neighborhood of D.C., Harris spent time with his maternal grandfather and saw 'The Motortown Revue' at the Howard Theatre.

African American mothers.

Dunbar High School (Washington, D.C.).

African American fathers--Washington (D.C.).

African American educators--Washington (D.C.).

Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

African American children--Washington (D.C.).