

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Harold Freeman

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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>	Freeman, Harold P.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 17, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:20).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Oncologist Dr. Harold Freeman (1933 - ) authored the landmark report, "Cancer in the Economically Disadvantaged," which established the links between poverty and excess cancer mortality. Freeman was national president of the American Cancer Society from 1988 to 1989, and is the chief architect of its Initiative on Cancer and the Poor. Freeman was the director of the Department of Surgery at Harlem Hospital Center from 1974 to 1999. Freeman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 17, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_034
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Harold Freeman, M.D., the preeminent authority on the subject of poverty and cancer, was born on March 2, 1933, in Washington, D.C. Freeman attended Washington D.C.'s Catholic University and continued his studies at Howard University Medical School.

After graduation, Freeman moved to New York to complete his residency at Memorial Sloan-Kettering, beginning his medical career at Harlem Hospital Center in 1967. At the Harlem Hospital Center, Freeman was shocked to learn that the majority of his patients had hopelessly advanced cases of cancer. Freeman set out to determine the cause of higher mortality rates of these African Americans and to reduce the race and income related disparities in health care.

In 1979, Freeman established two free breast- and cervical-cancer-screening centers in Harlem in order to improve the chances of early detection. He authored the landmark report, "Cancer in the Economically Disadvantaged," which established the links between poverty and excess cancer mortality. Freeman was national president of the American Cancer Society from 1988 to 1989, is the chief architect of its Initiative on Cancer and the Poor, and was honored in 1990 by the American Cancer Society with the creation of a special award in his name.

Freeman was the director of the Department of Surgery for twenty-five years at Harlem Hospital Center (1974-1999). Currently, Dr. Freeman is professor of clinical surgery at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Freeman is chairman of the U.S. President's Cancer Panel, a position he has held since 1991, and was appointed as director of the National Cancer Institute's Center for Reducing Health Disparities in 2000.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Harold Freeman was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 17, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Oncologist Dr. Harold Freeman (1933 - ) authored the landmark report, "Cancer in the Economically Disadvantaged," which established the links between poverty and excess cancer mortality. Freeman was national president of the American Cancer Society from 1988 to 1989, and is the chief architect of its Initiative on Cancer and the Poor. Freeman was the director of the Department of Surgery at Harlem Hospital Center from 1974 to 1999.

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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:

Freeman, Harold P.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Freeman, Harold P.--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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Harlem Hospital (New York, N.Y.)

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### Occupations:

Oncologist

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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. Harold Freeman, May 17, 2001. 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. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman talks about his family background from the antebellum period to the 1920s. He tells about a slave ancestor from North Carolina who, by

being allowed to retain half of his off-plantation earnings as a carpenter, saved up enough to purchase his freedom in 1838 and took at that time the name "Freeman"; Another ancestor, Robert Freeman, graduated from Harvard Dental School and was the first African American dentist. Dr. Harold P. Freeman's grandfather was also a physician in Washington, D.C., and his father, Clyde, an attorney. His mother, Lucille, was born in Galveston, Texas, and raised by her mother and a stepfather, Rev. Thomas. In her teens she moved to D.C., and met Clyde Freeman at a tennis tournament in Philadelphia.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman recalls his childhood in Washington D.C., and talks about his family, school, faithful attendance at Catholic church, and the family's strong focus on tennis. As a toddler he was taken to the tennis court by his mother, Lucille Thomas Freeman, and by age five he was playing himself. Within a few years he was playing in tournaments of the black-only American Tennis Association and at age fifteen was the national champion in his age group. Dr. Freeman sees both religion and tennis as positive forces affecting his mental and spiritual growth during his youth. He reflects on his father's death when he was thirteen and his mother's dedication in raising her family as a single parent from that time on. He also considers at length the "peculiar situation" of segregation having some positive side-effects, such as cohesive black communities and excellent black schools like Paul Laurence Dunbar High School which he attended.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman talks about his secondary and higher education and medical training. He shares a strong memory of crushing experience at Paul Laurence Dunbar High school in Washington, D.C. when a black guidance counselor cautioned students that setting "unrealistic" professional career goals would only lead to disappointment; Freeman recalls that when he returned home in tears, his mother, furious with the counselor, managed to talk him into not giving up his dream of becoming a doctor. Freeman goes on to recall his years at Catholic University, where he won a high award and captained the tennis and basketball teams. He describes the hard work involved at Howard University School of Medicine, his decision to become a surgeon, his internship and residency at Freedman's Hospital and further surgical residency at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He talks about his mentor at Memorial, Dr. Arthur Holleb, who later went to the American Cancer Society, and recalls confronting Holleb in 1978 over the low breast cancer survival rate of black women at Harlem Hospital and the ACS's lack of presence in Harlem; this led to Dr. Holleb appointing Dr. Freeman to the board of the ACS to help bring a focus to the issue of cancer and race.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:54 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman talks about his medical training, his work at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and at Harlem Hospital, the increasing public attention to cancer in the 1960s-1970s and his own developing interest in the connections between race, poverty and disease.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman talks about the intersections between race, culture, poverty and disease, about the changing nature of racism in America, and how

viewing people through the lens of race affects their health care. He discusses his ideas about patient navigation to improve access to treatment for those diagnosed with cancer and how a program utilizing these ideas has been successful in Harlem. He also discusses his future; he plans to continue his work with the new cancer center at North General Hospital in Harlem, and his hopes to influence policy on a larger scale as Chair of the President's Cancer Panel and as Director of the National Cancer Institute's Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Harold Freeman, Section A2001\_034\_001\_006, TRT: 0:07:50 ?

Dr. Harold P. Freeman talks about his 1990 research paper showing that a black male in Harlem has less of a chance of reaching age 65 than a male growing up on Bangladesh. Looking back over his life, he reflects that in his case, adversity made him stronger. He considers the accomplishments he has made and what he would like his legacy to be.