

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roger Wilkins

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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>	Wilkins, Roger W., 1932-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 22, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:26:45).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper columnist Roger Wilkins (1932 - 2017 ) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and publisher of NAACP journal, "The Crisis." In 1972, Wilkins began writing for the editorial page of, "The Washington Post," just as the Watergate scandal was breaking, winning him a shared Pulitzer Prize, along with reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and cartoonist Herb Block. Wilkins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 22, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_078
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pulitzer Prize-winning author and distinguished professor Roger Wilkins was born in 1932 in Kansas City, Missouri. His father, a business manager with a prominent black paper, *The Kansas City Call*, died when Wilkins was a child and the family moved to New York and then to Michigan, where Wilkins spent most of his formative years.

Wilkins attended the University of Michigan, receiving his B.A. in 1953 and his J.D. in 1956, interning with Thurgood Marshall at the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund. Following graduation, Wilkins worked in several capacities as an advocate for justice. Beginning his career as a caseworker in the Ohio Welfare Department, Wilkins went on to work for the U.S. Agency for International Development and then as assistant attorney general under President Lyndon B. Johnson. Wilkins' interest in legal issues and equality stems partially from his family's background. His uncle, Roy Wilkins, was executive secretary of the NAACP from 1955 to 1977.

In 1972, Wilkins began writing for the editorial page of *The Washington Post* just as the Watergate scandal was breaking. His critically informed editorials about the issues leading up to President Richard Nixon's resignation won him a shared Pulitzer Prize, along with reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and cartoonist Herb Block. He then moved to *The New York Times*, where he served as the first African American on its editorial board as well as a columnist. Subsequently, Wilkins worked for the Institute for Policy Studies, *The Washington Star*, National Public Radio and CBS Radio. He continues to be a major commentator and analyst on American public policy and social justice issues.

Wilkins was a history professor at George Mason University. He was also the author of several books, including *A Man's Life* (1982), *Quiet Riots* (1988) with Fred Harris, and *Jefferson's Pillow* (2001). In addition, Wilkins was the

publisher of the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis*.

Wilkins passed away March 26, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Roger Wilkins was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on June 22, 2001, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist Roger Wilkins (1932 - 2017 ) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and publisher of NAACP journal, "The Crisis." In 1972, Wilkins began writing for the editorial page of, "The Washington Post," just as the Watergate scandal was breaking, winning him a shared Pulitzer Prize, along with reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and cartoonist Herb Block.

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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:

Wilkins, Roger W., 1932-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilkins, Roger W., 1932---Interviews

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African American journalists--Interviews

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George Mason University--Faculty--Interviews

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Authors and publishers--Interviews

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African Americans--Genealogy

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National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

---

Wilkins, Roy, 1901-1981

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School integration--United States

---

Fathers--Death--Psychological aspects

---

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs

---

Grand Rapids (Mich.)--Social Conditions

---

Tubman, Harriet, 1820?-1913

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Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972

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University of Michigan

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Civil Rights Movement

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Hoover, J. Edgar (John Edgar), 1895-1972

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Vietnam War, 1961-1975

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Kennedy, John F.--(John Fitzgerald),1917-1963

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United States--Politics and government--1963-1969

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Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973

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Pulitzer Prizes

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New York Times Company--Trials, litigation, etc.

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Mandela, Nelson, 1918-

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Newspaper employees--New York (State)--New York--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:

Newspaper Columnist

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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 Roger Wilkins, June 22, 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 Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins shares detailed information about his family background, including stories of his great-great-grandfathers who were former slaves. He shares his favorite childhood memory, the story of how his uncle Roy Wilkins began working for the NAACP's TheCrisis magazine, and pays tribute to his father. Finally, he discusses his views about integration.

African American journalists--Interviews.

George Mason University--Faculty--Interviews.

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

African Americans--Genealogy.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Wilkins, Roy, 1901-1981.

School integration--United States.

Fathers--Death--Psychological aspects.

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Grand Rapids (Mich.)--Social conditions.

Tubman, Harriet, 1820?-1913.

Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972.

University of Michigan.

Civil rights movements.

Hoover, J. Edgar (John Edgar), 1895-1972.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

United States--Politics and government--1963-1969.

Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973.

Pulitzer Prizes.

New York Times Company--Trials, litigation, etc.

Mandela, Nelson, 1918-.

Newspaper employees--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins discusses his mother, including her background, her strength after the death of his father in 1941, and her professional accomplishments. He reflects his understanding of his father's death and, subsequently, his move to Harlem, New York. He describes his childhood and educational experience in Harlem, New York and, after his mother remarries, his adolescent struggles in middle-class, integrated Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:48 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins describes the differences in the relationships that he had with his father and stepfather. He reflects on how his father's death affected his personality. He discusses his personal heroes, former slave and abolitionist Harriet Tubman and African American baseball legend Jackie Robinson. He also talks about the color prejudice among African Americans. Finally, he discusses his experiences at the University of Michigan, his attempt to enlist in the United States Air Force after graduation in 1953, and his final decision to go to law school.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:49 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins describes the race relations of the University of Michigan, where he received his A.B. in 1953 and his L.L.B. in 1956. He also discusses his law career but, more specifically, his natural inclination toward issues of civil rights. He discusses his contributions and commitment to the Civil Rights Movement, even amidst accusations of being a spy as a worker for the United States Department of Justice. Finally, he reflects on his views of the Vietnam War and J. Edgar Hoover.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins discusses his governmental, behind the scenes role in the Civil Rights Movement. He discusses his overall opinions of the John F. Kennedy administration, specifically as it compared to the Lyndon B. Johnson administration and its significance for African Americans. He describes his editorial written about the Gridiron Dinner in 1970 and, in addition, his commitment to upholding his honor and contributing to social change. Finally, he discusses receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1979, joining the 'New York Times, and what it has meant to him to be a journalist.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_006, TRT: 0:26:52 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins reflects on the depression he suffered as a result of his father's death. He discusses his career at the New York Times, including being a part of a discrimination lawsuit against the newspaper. He discusses his career opportunities since he ultimately left journalism in 1979, including teaching and his work with Nelson Mandela. Wilkins reflects on his continued commitment to the black struggle and also his hopes and fears for the black community. Finally, he describes his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Roger Wilkins, Section A2001\_078\_001\_007, TRT: 0:27:57 ?

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roger W. Wilkins shares a multitude of personal photographs.