

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with R. Donahue Peebles

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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>	Peebles, R. Donahue, 1960-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 15, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:19:54).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Real estate entrepreneur R. Donahue Peebles (1960 - ) is the owner of the Peebles Corporation, which has developed and/or owned over one million square feet of commercial property in Washington, D.C. and was later appointed to the District of Columbia's Board of Equalization & Review, and became chairman of the board. Peebles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 15, 2002, in Miami, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_063
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on March 2, 1960, the only son of a civil servant and a real estate broker, Roy Donahue Peebles grew up in Washington, D.C. After his parents' divorce in 1967, Peebles moved with his mother to Detroit, spending only six months there before returning to Washington, D.C., to live with his father.

As a teenager, Peebles worked as a congressional page and attended the United States Capitol Page High School, where he graduated in 1978. Following high school, he enrolled in Rutgers University, planning to go into medicine. However, in 1979, Peebles started his real estate career as an appraiser. In three years, he opened his own firm and had clients such as the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development and major financial and banking institutions. In 1983, at the age of twenty-three, Peebles' career took a meteoric rise after Mayor Marion Barry appointed him to the District of Columbia's Board of Equalization & Review (now known as the Board of Real Property Assessment & Appeal). In 1984, he became chairman of the board, the youngest chairman of any board in Washington, D.C.'s history. He served as chairman until 1988.

In 1987, Peebles' real estate development career was started when he constructed his first commercial building that year, a 100-thousand square foot office building in one of Washington, D.C.'s economically challenged neighborhoods. In 1989, Peebles established a highly successful commercial tax assessment appeal firm in Washington, D.C. Within two years, he was appealing over 400 tax assessment appeal cases annually and had the highest success rate of any tax assessment appeals firms in Washington, D.C.

In 1995, while on vacation in Miami with his wife and young son, Peebles read an article about Miami's search for a black developer to develop two old beach hotels, the Shorecrest and the Royal Palm. In early 1997, he decided to take his company, which had developed and/or owned over one million square feet of commercial properties in Washington, D.C., and moved its headquarters to Miami, Florida. Peebles expanded his company, The Peebles

Corporation, by creating hospitality and luxury residential divisions dedicated to the development and ownership of premiere hotel properties and high-end condominium properties. Peebles is recognized as the first African American to truly diversify South Florida's all-white ranks of developers. After a lengthy process, Peebles' company, Peebles Atlantic Development Corporation, was chosen to build the \$60 million project. In 1998, Peebles purchased the historic Miami Beach Bath Club that he developed into a luxury condominium complex.

Peebles is the vice chairman of the Greater Miami Conventions & Visitors Bureau, a former board member of Florida International University, and a member of the Visitors Industry Council Board. In March of 2004, he was named as an honorary chair of the Florida Builder's Association.

Peebles resides in Coral Gables, Florida with his wife, Katrina, their son, Donahue Peebles, III and daughter, Chloe Peebles.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with R. Donahue Peebles was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 15, 2002, in Miami, Florida, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Real estate entrepreneur R. Donahue Peebles (1960 - ) is the owner of the Peebles Corporation, which has developed and/or owned over one million square feet of commercial property in Washington, D.C. and was later appointed to the District of Columbia's Board of Equalization & Review, and became chairman of the board.

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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:

Peebles, R. Donahue, 1960-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Peebles, R. Donahue, 1960---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:

Real Estate Entrepreneur

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 R. Donahue Peebles, April 15, 2002. 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 R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:32 ?

R. Donahue Peebles talks about his family history. His mother, Ruth Yvonne Willoughby Poole, was born to a hotel doorman in Washington, D.C. His father, Roy Donahue Peebles, Sr., was born in 1930 in Emporia, Virginia. After serving in the military, his father worked as an auto mechanic and then in an administrative position for the Federal Power Commission [now the Nuclear Regulatory Commission]. Peebles talks about his experiences growing up in Washington, D.C. until his parents divorced in 1968 when he was eight years old. He then lived with his mother in Detroit, Michigan until they returned to Washington, D.C. in 1973 when he was thirteen years old. As a child, Peebles met many influential African American professionals and aspired to make an important contribution to society.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

R. Donahue Peebles worked as a congressional page and attended the United States Capitol Page High School, where he graduated in 1978. When he and his mother left Detroit [Michigan], her successful real estate career faltered, and they struggled to make ends meet. Peebles worked a series of menial jobs to earn money. The swift change in his family's economic standing transformed his life goals and fostered a strong work ethic. Following high school, he enrolled in Rutgers University with plans of going to medical school. After one year, he decided to leave college in order to learn about business through firsthand experience. Despite his political connections and experience, Peebles decided to seek economic power over pursuing a political career.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

R. Donahue Peebles talks about his early real estate career and his involvement with Washington D.C.'s Mayor Marion Barry in the 1980s. In 1979, Peebles started his real estate career as an appraiser. Within three years, he opened his own firm and had the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development and major financial and banking institutions as clients. In 1983, at the age of twenty-three, Peebles was appointed by Mayor Marion to Washington D.C.'s Property Tax Appeal Board. In 1984, Peebles became chairman of the board, the youngest chairman of any board in Washington, D.C.'s history. He served as chairman until 1988 and became a major fundraiser for Marion Barry. Peebles reflects upon Marion Barry's shortcomings as mayor and the role race played in Peebles' failure to win a government real estate contract despite producing a significantly lower bid.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:13 ?

R. Donahue Peebles discusses his failure to win a government contract on his real estate bid in 1995 and his subsequent decision to start buying real estate in Miami, Florida. Due to political and media pressure to avoid the appearance of favoring African American businessmen, Mayor Marion Barry gave a development deal to a white businessman even though Peebles had offered a lower bid. Peebles views Marion Barry as a failed mayor who set a poor

example for African Americans due to his personal conduct and left the city of Washington, D.C. in bad economic condition. Peebles felt betrayed by Marion Barry over the real estate deal, so he moved to Maryland. After buying a vacation home in Miami, Florida, Peebles seized an opportunity for an African American developer to buy two hotels in South Beach.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

R. Donahue Peebles details winning his real estate development bid in April 1996. Although Peebles was the underdog, he garnered enough support on the City Commission to top the competing bid from Hyatt Hotels which was a white developer in partnership with an African American. African Americans staged a national tourism boycott in Miami, Florida in the mid-1990s because African Americans had been excluded from the economic mainstream of the tourism and hospitality industry. In order to settle the boycott, which cost Miami at least \$50 million, the city set aside \$10 million for an African American operated hotel. After five years, Peebles' hotel was built, and he committed to providing job opportunities for African Americans in the hotel industry.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

R. Donahue Peebles became the first African American member of Miami Florida's exclusive Bath Club in 1996. Peebles later bought and developed the Bath Club into luxury condos. When the mayor opposed his development plans, Peebles fought back with mailers and television ads which led to a runoff mayoral election. While Peebles still affiliates with the Democratic Party, he criticizes the lack of black political representation and claims that white Democrats do not vote for black Democratic candidates. By contrast, Peebles applauds George W. Bush's appointment of Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice to his cabinet. Peebles views affirmative action as ineffective and believes that it should only benefit African Americans and Native Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Donahue Peebles, Section A2002\_063\_001\_007, TRT: 0:21:24 ?

R. Donahue Peebles describes the promise of the real estate industry. Peebles hopes that the African American community will connect with their history of entrepreneurship and be more politically active. Peebles wants his legacy to be that he improved the lives of others. Peebles concludes by narrating his photographs.