

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lerone Bennett

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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>	Bennett, Lerone, 1928-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 29, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:02:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Historian Lerone Bennett (1928 - 2018 ) served as the executive editor of <i>Ebony</i> magazine for almost forty years. His written work, including a seminal piece of literature, "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America, 1619-1962," explored the history of race relations in the United States, as well as the current environment in which African Americans strive for equality. Bennett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 29, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_167
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian Lerone Bennett served as the executive editor of *Ebony* for almost forty years. His written work deftly explored the history of race relations in the United States as well as the current environment in which African Americans strive for equality. Bennett was born on October 17, 1928, in Clarksdale, Mississippi, to Lerone and Alma Reed Bennett. When Bennett was young, his family moved to Jackson, Mississippi, and it was here, while attending Jackson's public schools,

that Bennett's interest in journalism was initiated.

Bennett attended Morehouse College, earning a B.A. in 1949. He always considered Morehouse as the center of his academic development. After graduating, Bennett formally entered the world of journalism as a reporter for the now defunct *Atlanta Daily World*. He became the city editor for the magazine and worked there until 1953, when he began his work as an associate editor at *Jet* magazine in Chicago, Illinois. In 1954, Bennett became an associate editor at *Ebony* and he was promoted to senior editor of the magazine in 1958. Since then, his comprehensive articles became one of the magazine's literary hallmarks.

A series of articles originally published in *Ebony* resulted in Bennett's first book, a seminal piece of work, *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America, 1619-1962*. The book, with its comprehensive examination of the history of African Americans in the United States, gave Bennett the reputation of a first-class popular historian. In his eight subsequent books, Bennett continued to document the historical forces shaping the Black experience in the United States. His other works included: *What Manner of Man?*, *Pioneers In Protest* and *The Shaping of Black America*.

Bennett received numerous awards such as the Literature Award of the Academy of Arts and Letters, Book of the Year Award from Capital Press Club and the Patron Saints Award from the Society of Midland Authors. He served as advisor and consultant to several national organizations and commissions, including the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Bennett's articles, short stories and poems have been translated into five languages.

Bennett passed away on February 14, 2018 at age 89.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lerone Bennett was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 29, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Historian Lerone Bennett (1928 - 2018 ) served as the executive editor of *Ebony* magazine for almost forty years. His written work, including a seminal piece of literature, "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America, 1619-1962," explored the history of race relations in the United States, as well as the current environment in which African Americans strive for equality.

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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:

Bennett, Lerone, 1928-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Historian

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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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 Lerone Bennett, August 29, 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 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual

## 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 Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:24 2002/08/29

Editor and author Lerone Bennett Jr. discusses his family background and his own childhood years in Jackson, Mississippi. He describes his passion for reading and recalls his observations and concerns at an early age about the violent and virulent racism that existed in 1930s Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:11 2002/08/29

Writer, editor and activist Lerone Bennett remembers his youth in Mississippi in the 1940s. He tells about his family's musical talents, recalls playing with Duke Huddleston's orchestra as a teenager, and describes racist incidents he experienced while on tour. He talks about his education, his early interest in black history, and his goal of attending Morehouse College because he admired professionals in the community who were "Morehouse men."

Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:13 2002/08/29

Writer, editor and activist Lerone Bennett tells about his life-forming experiences at Morehouse College in Atlanta in the late 1940s, his choice of a career in journalism, his work at the Atlanta Daily World newspaper, being recruited by John H. Johnson to come to Chicago to work

for him, and the excitement of his early years with Johnson's 'Jet' and 'Ebony' magazines.

Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:44 2002/08/29

Writer, editor and activist Lerone Bennett talks about some of the historical works he has written while at Johnson Publishing, concentrating especially on 'Before the Mayflower' (1962), which evolved from a series of articles in 'Ebony' telling the often overlooked story of early African American history, and 'Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream' (2000), an examination of Lincoln's racism. Bennett discusses reaction to his work from historians, the press and the public and he emphasizes that the controversial positions in his writing and speeches do not represent the views of 'Ebony' or publisher John H. Johnson.

Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:37 2002/08/29

Author, editor and activist Lerone Bennett discusses his recent (2000) work 'Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream', which debunks Lincoln's image as the Great Emancipator. He talks about problems in American historical scholarship on Lincoln in particular and in general as being too supportive of the status quo. Bennett also talks about writers Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Gwendolyn Brooks, the continued racism in America, and the need for reparations for slavery.

Video Oral History Interview with Lerone Bennett, Section  
A2002\_167\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:12 2002/08/29

Writer, editor and activist Lerone Bennett shares his thoughts about the present and future of African Americans, the importance of reparations and an apology for slavery from the United States government, his concerns about drugs, electronic media and the large number of blacks in prisons, and the need for a sense of unity and mobilization among the black community. He considers his legacy and the lessons he would like to pass on to black youth.