

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Russell Adams

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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>	Adams, Russell L.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 16, 2003 and July 28, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:15:12).
<b>Abstract:</b>	African american studies professor Russell Adams (1930 - ) was the professor emeritus and the former chair of Afro-American studies at Howard University. Adams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 16, 2003 and July 28, 2003, in Suitland, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_157
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Russell Lee Adams was born on August 13, 1930, in Baltimore, Maryland, to James Russell Adams, a commercial farmer, and Isabelle, a teacher. Adams' family, including his two brothers and a sister, moved to Quitman, Georgia, where he attended elementary and high schools. After graduating with a B.A. from Morehouse College in 1952, Adams attended graduate school at the University of Chicago, where he earned his M.A. in 1954 and, later, his Ph.D.

From 1958 to 1964, Adams worked in Chicago as a Cook County probation officer. In 1965, he returned to academia as assistant professor at North Carolina Central University in Durham. He worked there until 1969; the next two years he spent at the University of the District of Columbia as associate professor. In 1971, Adams was hired as chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Howard University, a position he has held for more than three decades.

A popular keynote speaker, Adams has lectured at many universities, including the University of Maryland, Columbia University, Georgetown University, Rutgers University and Harvard University. As a consultant, he has also developed and evaluated instructional programs and conducted workshops on cultural and curriculum diversity. His clients have included the public school districts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Wilmington, Delaware; the Montgomery County Board of Education; and black studies programs at a number of American universities.

A prolific writer, Adams has published several books and edited collections, and his work has appeared in numerous periodicals. He writes and reviews articles for the *Journal of Negro Education*. He also served as a primary adviser and contributor to the three-volume Time-Life series *African Americans: Voices of Triumph*.

Adams lives with his wife, Eleanor, in Suitland, Maryland. They have one son, Russell Lowell Adams.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Russell Adams was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 16, 2003 and July 28, 2003, in Suitland, Maryland, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. African american studies professor Russell Adams (1930 - ) was the professor emeritus and the former chair of Afro-American studies at Howard University.

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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:

Adams, Russell L.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

Adams, Russell L.--Interviews  
African Americans--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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Howard University

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## Occupations:

African American Studies Professor

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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 Russell Adams, July 16, 2003 and July 28, 2003.  
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 Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Russell Adams was born on August 13, 1930 in Baltimore, Maryland. His mother, Isabella Ponder, was born in Brooks County, Georgia in 1902. She grew up on a commercial farm in Quitman, Georgia and attended Edward Waters College in Jacksonville, Florida for two years. Adams' father, James Russell Adams, was born in 1897. He also grew up on a commercial farm in Quitman.

Adams' paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Young Adams, was a midwife in Brooks County. Adams recalls that both African Americans and white people, of all classes, attended her funeral in 1945. When he was young, Adams' family moved to Quitman to manage his paternal family's farm. He remembers working on the farm and learning strategies to avoid racist interactions with white people. His mother encouraged his love of reading and decided that he should attend a better public school in town. He recalls a final conversation with his father, in 1981, and the respect his father was accorded by both the black and white communities at his funeral.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Russell Adams' parents met in Quitman, Georgia. After the Ku Klux Klan burned down his paternal grandparents' house in 1929, his parents moved to Baltimore, Maryland. The family returned to Quitman in the early 1940s. Adams had a passion for reading as a child; by age twelve he paid for a subscription to Life magazine. Adams graduated from high school in 1948. He was valedictorian of his class and won a full scholarship to college through a national contest sponsored by Pepsi-Cola. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Adams talks about his mentors at Morehouse, and Morehouse president Dr. Benjamin Mays. He also describes other notable figures, such as HistoryMaker Lerone Bennett, Hazel Scott, Maynard Jackson, Sr. and Jr., and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who he encountered in Atlanta. Adams wrote for the Maroon Tiger, the school newspaper. In 1952, he graduated with a B.A. degree in political science and began his graduate studies at the University of Chicago in Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Russell Adams attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia from 1948 to 1952. The student population of the school was economically diverse. Adams took required etiquette lessons. He describes campus parties, visiting girls at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia and the competitive intellectual environment at Morehouse. He also talks about participating in intercollegiate debate contests. Adams studied political science, history, and sociology under top professors such as Robert Brisbane and Melvin Kennedy. He remembers a memorable address Morehouse president Dr. Benjamin Mays gave. Adams enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois in 1952. Adams explains the impact of the G.I. Bill on HBCUs and how the education of African American veterans impacted the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. He also talks about the legal case Missouri ex rel. Gaines vs. Canada (1938). Adams visited Lillian Smith's home in 1949, shortly after the publication of 'Killers of the Dream.'

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Russell Adams studied under political scientists Hans Morgenthau and Herman Finer while a student at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. Adams recalls the de facto segregation in Chicago during the 1950s. At the U of C, he experienced racial discrimination as a research assistant and lived in segregated housing before integrating Snell Hitchcock Hall. He also observed the racial hierarchy in the mail room at the University of Chicago's Billings Hospital where he worked to earn extra money. He also remembers fellow classmates inviting him to a showing of 'The Birth of a Nation' at Chicago's Biograph Theatre. He recalls witnessing a meeting of atomic scientists and a performance by Paul Robeson. Adams sought opportunities to socialize with other African Americans, such as patronizing Brown's Barber Shop in the city's Hyde Park neighborhood. Adams talks about the racial history of interstate travel and the

formation of the American Negro Emancipation Centennial Authority in 1962.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_002\_005, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Russell Adams taught political science at North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina from 1965 to 1969. After chairing the department for three years, he transferred to Washington, D.C.'s Federal City College. Howard University recruited Adams in 1971. In 1972, he became chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies. Adams details the history of Afro-American studies at Howard. In the early 1920s, the university denied Carter G. Woodson's proposal for a course on the history of black people. The Department of Afro-American Studies was officially established in 1969. As chair, Adams developed the department's guiding principles. He has largely sacrificed his personal scholarship, which examines the epistemology of Afro-American studies, to prioritize his administrative responsibilities. Adams explains the continuing need for Afro-American studies departments and shares his opinion on the direction the field should take in the future.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_002\_006, TRT: 0:29:02 ?

Russell Adams published 'Great Negroes: Past and Present' in 1976. Adams talks about the purpose of Afro-American studies departments and his guiding principles for Howard University's Afro-American studies department. In addition to chairing the Department of Afro-American Studies at Howard, he also researches the administrative foundations of black social advocacy and the evolution of black community institutions after the Civil War. Adams describes the economic segregation within the African American community in the post-Civil Rights era and talks about the history of collective violence against the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_002\_007, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Russell Adams talks about Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's 1974 study of slavery, 'Time on the Cross.' Adams explains why he disagrees with the findings of the study. In the 1990s, Adams contributed to the African Burial Ground project at Howard University by providing background on the history of slavery in New York and the sociocultural characteristics of the state's black population. At Howard, Adams taught courses on the history of slavery, and in the early 2000s, he reviewed history manuscripts for American publishing companies such as Time Life and McGraw-Hill. Adams explains how general disinterest and the topic's sensitivity have dissuaded African American historians from writing more texts on slavery. Adams talks about the works of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Sterling Brown, the Lost Cause mythology and southern interpretations of the Civil War, and gives examples of the popularization of American history.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_002\_008, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Russell Adams taught in and chaired the Department of Afro-American Studies at Washington, D.C.'s Howard University from 1971 to 2005. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s pushed universities to create Afro-American studies departments. This newly educated generation of students and professors, including HistoryMaker Manning Marable, revised southern interpretations of slavery and the Civil War by devoting themselves to the study of African American life and culture. Adams explains how much research of the late 20th century has diverged into distinct schools of African studies. He identifies himself as an infusionist because he has examined the connection between Afro-American studies and other disciplines. Adams describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community; he reflects upon his legacy; and he considers what he would have done differently.

Video Oral History Interview with Russell Adams, Section A2003\_157\_002\_009, TRT: 0:20:15 ?

Russell Adams reflects upon his decision to pursue a career in academia. He describes how he would like to be remembered and concludes by narrating his photographs.