

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harry G. Robinson, III

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Robinson, Harry G.  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harry G. Robinson, III,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | November 19, 2003   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2003  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:49:21).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Urban designer and academic administrator Harry G. Robinson, III (1942 - ) is the James E. Silcott Professor of Architecture and dean emeritus at Howard University, where he has served as vice president and dean of the School of Architecture and Planning. In 1976, he founded and became the principal of the Robinson Group, an urban design consulting firm. Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 19, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2003_271   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator and city planner Harry G. Robinson III was born in Washington, D.C., on January 18, 1942. Robinson attended Howard University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in architecture in 1966 and his master's degree in city planning in 1970. He went on to receive his master's degree in city planning and urban design from Harvard University in 1972.

After earning his bachelor's degree, Robinson served in the Army, achieving the rank of First Lieutenant. He earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart during his tour of duty in Vietnam. Robinson began his architectural career with the District of Columbia Redevelopment Land Agency as an architect and planner in 1968, where he remained until 1972. During that same time, he was a professor at the University of Washington, D.C., until 1974. Robinson also taught at Morgan State University from 1971 until 1979. In 1976, he founded and became the principal of the Robinson Group, an urban design consulting firm. In 1979, Robinson was named the dean of architecture and planning at Howard University, a position he held until 1995 when he was named vice president of the university. He remains there today as James E. Silcott Professor of Architecture and Dean Emeritus

Robinson is active in a wide variety of professional organizations. He is the founder of the African American Architect Initiative, vice chairman of the United States Commission on Fine Arts and a professional advisor to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. Robinson also serves on the board of directors of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Robinson presided over an international competition in Dakar, Senegal, for urban planners and architects to design a cultural complex, the Goree Memorial, in 1995. Robinson and his wife, Dianne, have three children.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harry G. Robinson, III was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 19, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Urban designer and academic administrator Harry G. Robinson, III (1942 - ) is the James E. Silcott Professor of Architecture and dean emeritus at Howard University, where he has served as vice president and dean of the School of Architecture and Planning. In 1976, he founded and became the principal of the Robinson Group, an urban design consulting firm.

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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:

Robinson, Harry G.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Robinson, Harry G.--Interviews

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African American architects--Interviews

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Howard University--Faculty--Interviews

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City planners--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:

Urban Designer

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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 Harry G. Robinson, III, November 19, 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 Harry G. Robinson, III, Section A2003\_271\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Harry G. Robinson, III was born on January 18, 1942 in Washington, D.C. His mother, Lucille Gwendolyn Herriford Robinson, was born in Kansas City, Missouri. Both her father and grandfather were educators. Robinson's father, Harry G. Robinson, Jr., was born in Washington, D.C. Robinson's paternal grandfather owned a moving company in Washington, D.C. His paternal grandmother was the daughter of a Howard University professor. Robinson's father had seven siblings all of whom went to college. Robinson's father earned his B.A. degree from Howard in 1934 and worked at the post office. His mother was a homemaker and worked for the U.S. Census Bureau in the 1950s and later, at the Howard University College of Dentistry. Robinson talks about his parents' friends, who included Howard University President James Nabrit and surgeon Charles Drew. Robinson also talks about his extended family and growing up near Howard University's campus. He reflects upon the success of his family.

African American architects--Interviews.

Howard University--Faculty--Interviews.

City planners--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry G. Robinson, III, Section A2003\_271\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Harry G. Robinson, III recalls the sights, sounds, and smells of growing up in Washington, D.C., on Howard University's campus, where he became acquainted with HistoryMaker Andrew Young and his brother Walter. Interactions with a friend's father, Zack Wheat, in the fifth grade piqued his interest in becoming an architect. He attended James Monroe Elementary School and Banneker Junior High before transferring to the integrated McFarland Junior High in 1954, where he was one of a dozen black students. At Roosevelt Senior High School, he played football, participated in JROTC, and became a distinguished rifleman for the NRA. Robinson recalls winning a high school science fair by creating a solar house. After high school, he enrolled at Howard, where he studied architecture with design honors and earned his B.S. degree in 1966. Robinson describes his professors, who included Toni Morrison and architects Howard Mackey, Frank West, and Leroy John Henry Brown. He also describes his visits to Vietnam in the 1990s.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry G. Robinson, III, Section A2003\_271\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Harry G. Robinson, III returned to Washington, D.C. in 1967 after being injured in the Vietnam War and worked at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center through 1968. He then worked for the D.C. Redevelopment Land Agency as an architect planner and started his own firm while earning his master's in city planning from Howard University School of Architecture and Design. In 1970, with funds from the G.I. Bill, vocation rehabilitation, and his own resources, he enrolled at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he earned a second M.C.P. degree in 1972. Robinson was recruited to teach at Morgan State University, where he founded the Center for Built Environment Studies. In 1979, he was hired by HistoryMaker James Cheek at Howard University as Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning. Robinson held several other positions at Howard, including Vice President of Academic Affairs. Robinson also chaired a commission on Goree Island for the United Nations and wrote a history of Howard.

Video Oral History Interview with Harry G. Robinson, III, Section A2003\_271\_001\_004, TRT:

0:20:45 ?

Harry G. Robinson talks about “Africentric” architecture and architects such as Jack Travis, who has designed homes for Spike Lee and Wesley Snipes among others, and Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, a Senegalese architect known for his large structures. He is a member of the National Organization of Minority Architects, through which he hopes to establish connections between black architects and the American Institute of Architects. Robinson was involved with the creation of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio and also did work in Senegal for UNESCO. He corrects a common historical misunderstanding of mathematician and astronomer Benjamin Banneker. Robinson shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his future plans, and reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.