

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Franklin

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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>	Franklin, Robert Michael, 1954-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 26, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:19:31).
<b>Abstract:</b>	College president and theologian Robert Franklin (1954 - ) was the Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University and former president of the Interdenominational Theological Center. Franklin also served as a program officer at the Ford Foundation. Franklin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 26, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_038
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Robert Michael Franklin, Jr., is the presidential distinguished professor of social ethics at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and former president of the Interdenominational Theological Center.

Franklin was born February 22, 1954 in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Morehouse College in 1975 with a double major in political science and religion before going on to study at the University of Durham in England to pursue

international studies. After traveling to North Africa and the Soviet Union, he enrolled in the Harvard Divinity School and received the master of divinity degree in 1978. He earned his doctorate degree in 1985 from the University of Chicago where his major fields of study included social ethics, psychology and African American religion.

Over the years, Franklin has worked as a scholar-theologian, educator, former seminary program administrator and foundation executive. He has served on the faculties of divinity and theology schools for the University of Chicago, Harvard University, Colgate-Rochester and Emory Universities. Before his presidency at the Interdenominational Theological Center, he served as a program officer at the Ford Foundation, where he was responsible for grants to African American churches that were engaged in secular social service delivery and for advising the president of the Foundation about future funding for religion and public life.

Franklin has written two books, *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African American Thought* and *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis*. He has also co-authored a book with Don Browning and others entitled *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*. Franklin is also the author of an internet study guide on the congregational use of the DreamWorks SKG film, *The Prince of Egypt*.

Sought after by the media, Franklin has provided guest commentary on religion for CNN and National Public Radio. He also serves on numerous boards of directors, including the Center on Philanthropy, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the Congress of National Black Churches, the Georgia Humanities Council and Religion and Ethics News Weekly. He is also a member of the advisory board of the American Assembly and the Children's Defense Fund's Black Church and Community Crusade. Franklin has worked with the White House on numerous projects related to religion, race, public health and community development. He is also a member of the professional fraternity Sigma Pi Phi.

Franklin has been married to obstetrician and gynecologist Dr. Cheryl Goffney Franklin since 1986. They have three children.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Franklin was conducted by Jodi Merriday on March 26, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 7

Became SP videocassettes. College president and theologian Robert Franklin (1954 - ) was the Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University and former president of the Interdenominational Theological Center. Franklin also served as a program officer at the Ford Foundation.

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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:**

Franklin, Robert Michael, 1954-

Merriday, Jodi (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Franklin, Robert Michael, 1954---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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Candler School of Theology

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Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta, Ga.)

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## **Occupations:**

Theologian

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College President

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ReligionMakers|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 Robert Franklin, March 26, 2004. 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 (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 Robert Franklin, Section  
A2004\_038\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:15 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin was born on February 22, 1954 in Chicago, Illinois. His mother, Lee McCann Franklin, was the youngest of nine children in a family of sharecroppers in Mississippi and migrated to Chicago as a preteen. His father, Robert Franklin, Sr., was born in Water Valley, Mississippi and was descended from members of the Kru tribe who were brought to America as slaves. Franklin's maternal grandmother, Martha McCann, lived in Chicago, where she tended a community garden and was a leader at St. Paul Church of God in Christ. His paternal grandfather,

Farney Franklin, could pass for white, and traveled from Mississippi to visit his grandchildren. Franklin lived with six siblings in Chicago's Far South Side, where he celebrated Christmas and delivered collard greens from his grandmother's garden. He attended Esmond Elementary School, where he had a kind teacher and was the class clown. Franklin's family was active in his church community, and he looked up to the example of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section  
A2004\_038\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:35 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin attended Esmond Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois until eighth grade, when he entered Morgan Park High School. Franklin was influenced by his pastor at St. Paul Church of God in Christ, Reverend Louis Henry Ford, who got him his first jobs working for the Chicago Park District and the Cook County Department of Building and Zoning, and brought celebrities like Lena Horne and Joe Louis to speak at the church. Among Franklin's high school friends were Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut, and Louis Price, a singer for the Temptations. While he attended Morgan Park, it had an integrated faculty and the school's student body was shifting from majority white to mixed. Franklin played music, attended speeches of Elijah Muhammad, and followed the Civil Rights Movement. An English teacher's praise for his essay on 'Native Son' encouraged him to study literature, and watching the funeral of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired him to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section  
A2004\_038\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:35 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin's interest in Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia grew after reading a profile of HistoryMaker Julian Bond; the local alumni club also encouraged him to apply. In his junior year at Morgan Park High School in Chicago, Franklin was expelled after being implicated in an attempted walk-out in which he had not participated that was organized by classmates in the Black Panther Party. Franklin's parents pled to the vice principal, Mitchell O'Bannon, on his behalf, and Franklin

was allowed to complete his junior year under probation. On the same day he was expelled, Franklin was fired from his grocery store job for underpaying for produce. He devoted himself to academics, joining the honors English class and earning a citizenship award from the administration upon graduation. Franklin applied to Morehouse, where his father had dreamed of attending, and was accepted. He developed his views on activism in conversation with his father, who was more cautious and prioritized discipline in communication.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section  
A2004\_038\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:45 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin traveled south with his mother to enter Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in the fall of 1971. He was welcomed by Bishop John D. Husband and initially lived in a fraternity house due to over-enrollment. Franklin was elected to the freshman council and, as a sophomore, became one of the student representatives to the board of trustees. He received a Luard Morse Scholarship from the English-Speaking Union of the United States to study abroad at Durham University in England for his junior year. While living internationally, Franklin visited Scotland, Spain, the Soviet Union, and Morocco, where he was exposed to a predominantly Muslim culture for the first time. These travels made him more skeptical of American politics and journalism, especially regarding the coverage of President Nixon's visit to the Soviet Union in 1974. Despite winning the Robert Brisbane Outstanding Award for Students of Political Science at Morehouse, Franklin's interest in political science waned during his senior year.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section  
A2004\_038\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:30 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin graduated from Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1975, then entered a master's program at the Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. At Harvard, Franklin gained an interest in psychopathology, which he made use of as a hospital chaplain in Chicago, Illinois while pursuing a Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago. He left Chicago before completing his degree in order to direct the master's program at Harvard Divinity

School, which he found unfulfilling, but did meet his wife, Cheryl Goffney Franklin, there. After a year at Harvard, Franklin became a professor at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York, and served as dean of black church studies. He left in 1988 to start a black church studies program at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. He became a program director at the Ford Foundation, president of the Interdenominational Theological Center and finally returned to Candler after suffering a knee injury while traveling in India.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section A2004\_038\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:15 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin worries that the shift toward government funding of faithbased initiatives could leave religious organizations beholden to politics. He wrote an editorial for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution on the film 'The Passion of the Christ,' which praised the characterization of Christ as a political victim but rebuked the film's anti-Semitic overtones. On the recommendation of his former professor Martin E. Marty, Franklin was hired as a commentator for National Public Radio, and provided his first editorial on the inauguration of President George W. Bush. He considers the present and future role of African American churches and shares his thoughts on gay marriage. Franklin describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, how he wants to be remembered and his plans for the future, including publishing the book he was writing at the time of the interview, 'Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope to African American Communities.' He reflects upon his father's pride in his success.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Franklin, Section A2004\_038\_001\_007, TRT: 0:19:36 2004/03/26

Robert Franklin reflects on the legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and talks about the pitfalls he sees regarding the prominence of megachurches in modern Christianity. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.