

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ralph Arnold

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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>	Arnold, Ralph, 1928-2006
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Arnold,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 25, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:31:30).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mixed media artist and art professor Ralph Arnold (1928 - 2006 ) earned his M.F.A. degree from the Art Institute of Chicago, and taught art as an assistant, lecturer and department chair at several colleges and universities. His work crossed several genres, and could be seen in numerous galleries and collections. Arnold was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 25, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_145
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Artist Ralph Arnold was born in Chicago, Illinois on December 5, 1928. After graduating from Blue Island High School in 1946, Arnold attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign briefly in 1947. He later returned there before transferring and graduating from Roosevelt University in 1955. In 1976, Arnold earned his M.F.A. degree from the Art Institute of Chicago.

After leaving the U of I the first time, Arnold enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving in Korea from 1950 until 1952. After entering Roosevelt University, Arnold became involved with the Skyloft Players, a theater group, where he worked with Abena Joan Brown and Okoro Harold Johnson. After graduating, Arnold focused on his art, and in 1969, he was hired by Rockford College as an assistant professor of painting. From there, he taught briefly at Barrat College before being named chairman of the art department at Loyola University of Chicago. Arnold also served as an adjunct lecturer at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Arnold's work crossed several genres, and could be seen in numerous galleries and collections. He created a series of collages entitled "Napoleon in Hawaii," some of which were displayed in the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago, and he had another piece on display in the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago. Arnold also had an interest in bookbinding. He was a member of the Illinois Arts Council for more than thirty years.

Arnold died on May 10, 2006 at the age of 77.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ralph Arnold was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 25, 2004, in Chicago,

Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mixed media artist and art professor Ralph Arnold (1928 - 2006 ) earned his M.F.A. degree from the Art Institute of Chicago, and taught art as an assistant, lecturer and department chair at several colleges and universities. His work crossed several genres, and could be seen in numerous galleries and collections.

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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:

Arnold, Ralph, 1928-2006

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Arnold, Ralph, 1928-2006--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:

Mixed Media Artist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Ralph Arnold, August 25, 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 6/7/2022 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 Ralph Arnold, Section A2004\_145\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:10  
2004/08/25

Ralph Arnold was born on December 5, 1928 in Chicago, Illinois. His biological mother, Mary Harris Moffitt, was born in Selma, Alabama in the late 1800s. Arnold believes his mother graduated from high school and obtained a teaching certificate before becoming a housewife. As a young woman, Arnold's mother moved to Chicago, Illinois where she married Arnold's biological father, Clarence Moffitt, an alcoholic. Arnold was adopted by his maternal aunt and uncle, Bertha Harris Arnold and Roy Arnold, after his mother died in childbirth. His two siblings were taken in by other relatives. Arnold's adoptive father told him stories about traveling the world as a minstrel in the early twentieth century.

As a child, Arnold lived in an all-white neighborhood in Knoxville, Tennessee, where his adoptive father worked as a janitor in a whites-only building. However, Arnold had to travel far to attend a black school. He had few friends and his white neighbors prevented him from playing with their children.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Arnold, Section A2004\_145\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:10  
2004/08/25

Ralph Arnold shares his memories of the 1993 Chicago World's Fair. He spent his formative years living in an all-white apartment building in Knoxville, Tennessee where his adoptive father and his adoptive grandmother were employed. She made his favorite foods and brought him to the circus. Arnold's family briefly lived in the black Mechanicsville neighborhood of Knoxville, where he attended the all-black University Seventh-Day Adventist School. When his family returned to the white neighborhood, he transferred to Green School, the closest black school. Near the end of primary school, Arnold's parents sent him to live with his maternal uncle John and his wife in Chicago, Illinois. Thrown out by his uncle, Arnold returned to Knoxville, where he attended Austin High School. Arnold later moved with his adoptive parents to Robbins, Illinois, attending Blue Island High School in Blue Island, Illinois. In high school, Arnold experienced racial discrimination and was often the only black student in school clubs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Arnold, Section A2004\_145\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:10  
2004/08/25

Ralph Arnold graduated from Blue Island High School in Blue Island, Illinois in 1946. After taking University of Illinois courses at Blue Island High School and at the University's Urbana-Champaign campus, where he lived at the international students' co-op, Arnold was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1949. He was stationed at Fort Sheridan, Fort Knox, and Fort Lawton before being sent to Korea on July 4, 1950 where he was the only black man in an all-white platoon. During the Korean War, Arnold met a sergeant who had never seen a black person before, and served under a black staff sergeant who saved Arnold's life. Arnold was also approached by two North Korean soldiers who asked about white officers' treatment of him. Only two soldiers in Arnold's anti-infantry outfit were killed. In 1950, he returned to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Prevented from graduating by a dean, his credentials were accepted at Roosevelt University in Chicago where he had taken summer classes. Arnold graduated in 1955.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Arnold, Section A2004\_145\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:00  
2004/08/25

Ralph Arnold was a member of the Skyloft Players, a Chicago-based theater group through which he met notable playwrights and actors, including Roxie Roker and Lorraine Hansberry as well as HistoryMakers Oscar Brown, Jr. and Okoro Harold Johnson. As a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Arnold acted in a Greek tragedy and an integrated staging of Thornton Wilder's 'Our Town.' In 1970, he became an art professor at Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois while studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He then taught at Barat College in Lake Forest, Illinois. In 1975, Arnold earned his M.F.A. degree and began teaching at Loyola University Chicago where he became the school's first black academic administrator upon the recommendations of Keith Anthony Morrison and Don Baum. Arnold's art consists of collage, constructions, and painting. He was featured in a national exhibit by the Whitney Museum of American Art alongside Romare Bearden and HistoryMaker Richard Hunt.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Arnold, Section A2004\_145\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:00  
2004/08/25

Ralph Arnold became interested in the life of Napoleon Bonaparte as an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His interest in Napoleon later inspired his collage series, 'Napoleon in Hawaii.' He keeps a diverse personal collection of art and objects, including glass bottles, African art, boxes, and Mickey Mouse memorabilia, in his home. Arnold talks about his philosophy of art and his parents' thoughts on his art. He also shows one of his most recent pieces. Arnold describes his hopes and concerns for the black community, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.