

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John S. Chase

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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>	Chase, John S., 1925-2012
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John S. Chase,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 1, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:33).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Architect and federal government appointee John S. Chase (1925 - 2012 ) was the first African American licensed to practice architecture in the state of Texas, and later was the first African American to be admitted to the Texas Society of Architects and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Chase co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects, in addition to becoming the first African American to serve on the United States Commission on Fine Arts during the Carter Administration. Chase was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 1, 2004, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_223
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Architect John Saunders Chase was born January 23, 1925, in Annapolis, Maryland. When his parents, Viola Hall Chase, a teacher and cook, and John S. Chase, Sr., a school principal and postal worker, separated, Chase was raised primarily by his mother. Every year at the United States Naval Academy graduation, Chase could earn \$25 for each tossed hat he retrieved. At Bates High School, his teacher, Mr. Marchand, introduced Chase to architecture; he earned his B.S. degree from Hampton University in 1948, and became the first African American to enroll in and graduate from the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture in 1952.

Chase's professional career began the same year as his graduation when he was appointed assistant professor of architectural drafting at Texas Southern University, and founded John S. Chase, AIA Architect. Chase's early designs were for churches, schools, homes, and small public buildings.

Chase became the first African American licensed to practice architecture in the state of Texas, and later was the first African American to be admitted to the Texas Society of Architects, and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Chase co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) along with 12 other black architects at the AIA convention in Detroit in 1971. When President Jimmy Carter selected him in 1980, Chase became the first African American to serve on the United States Commission on Fine Arts. Projects designed by Chase's firm include: the George R. Brown Convention Center, the Washington Technical Institute, Links, Inc., National Headquarters, Delta Sigma Theta National Headquarters, the Harris County Astrodome Renovation, the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. School of Humanities at Texas Southern University. Chase was later awarded a commission to design the United States Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia; a fifty million dollar complex.

Chase was elected to the AIA College of Fellows, was awarded the AIA Whitney M. Young Citation, and was the recipient of the NOMA Design for Excellence Award for four consecutive years. Chase also received the commendation for Meritorious Service by the Houston Independent School District, and the Honor Award for Architectural Excellence in School Design by the Texas Association of School Boards for his design of the Booker T. Washington High School. Chase and his wife, Drucie, raised three children together: John, Anthony and Saundria.

Chase passed away on March 29, 2012 at age 87.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John S. Chase was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 1, 2004, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Architect and federal government appointee John S. Chase (1925 - 2012 ) was the first African American licensed to practice architecture in the state of Texas, and later was the first African American to be admitted to the Texas Society of Architects and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Chase co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects, in addition to becoming the first African American to serve on the United States Commission on Fine Arts during the Carter Administration.

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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:

Chase, John S., 1925-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Chase, John S., 1925-2012--Interviews

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African American architects--Texas--Interviews

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United States--Officials and employees--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:

Architect

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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 John S. Chase, November 1, 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 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 John S. Chase, Section A2004\_223\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

John Chase was born January 23, 1925 in Annapolis, Maryland. His mother, Viola Hall Chase, was born in Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1896. She later moved to Annapolis with her parents. She left teaching to work as a cook and a maid in Washington, D.C., which was more lucrative. Chase's parents separated when he was ten years old. His father, John Chase, Sr., was intelligent but drank frequently, and Chase never knew him well. Chase grew up with one sister in Annapolis, and the town's jail sat down the block from his house. As a child, he hung around the U.S. Naval Academy selling candy to make extra money. Chase also frequently got into mischief with neighborhood friends. He had several influential elementary school teachers, including his manual arts teacher, Mr. Marchand. When Chase told him that he wanted to be the person who decides what buildings look like, Marchand told him he wanted to be an architect. Chase also describes his sister's family, including his nephew who worked for Mayor Harold Washington.

African American architects--Texas--Interviews.

United States--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with John S. Chase, Section A2004\_223\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

John Chase discovered his passion for building things early in life. He built his grandmother's tombstone while in sixth or seventh grade. During the summers, he worked odd jobs for contractors, which furthered his interest in designing buildings. He was quiet, studious and aspired to an architecture career. He was inspired by the architect Paul Williams. After graduating from Wiley H. Bates High School in Annapolis, Maryland, he matriculated at Hampton University in Virginia to study architectural engineering. At Hampton, his mentors in architecture included William H. Moses, Jr. and Benson Leroy Dutton, and he collaborated with classmate John T. Biggers. During college, he was drafted to serve in U.S. Army during World War II. He was deployed to the Philippines where he had to serve in a segregated army. After returning from the war, Chase was wrongfully jailed while driving with a friend through Heflin, Alabama. The sheriff refused to give them a receipt for their items when they were released.

Video Oral History Interview with John S. Chase, Section A2004\_223\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:16 ?

John Chase saw black soldiers stand up against mistreatment of Japanese prisoners of war during World War II. After his discharge from the U.S. Army, he resumed his studies at Hampton University in Virginia, graduating in 1948. He worked as a reinforced concrete engineer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania until deciding to go into business for himself. Chase moved to Austin, Texas where he recruited clients by visiting local church communities. He applied to the graduate school of architecture at the University of Texas at Austin as the school was being integrated in 1950. Chase received a mixed reception as one of the first black students at the University of Texas. However, his time there developed his professional connections and architectural knowledge, so he stayed involved as an alumni. Chase became the first black graduate from

University of Texas in 1952, and was the only licensed black architect in the state. Chase also became involved in politics while working at Texas Southern University in Houston.

Video Oral History Interview with John S. Chase, Section A2004\_223\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

John Chase worked to influence politics through his membership in the United Political Organization of Texas, but did not see a future for himself in office. Through this organization, he met President Lyndon Johnson while supporting John Connally's campaign for governor. He served on the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts under President Jimmy Carter and helped plan part of the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial. As the first licensed black architect in Texas, Chase worked extensively with historically black institutions, including Texas Southern University in Houston and Bishop College and Paul Quinn College in Dallas. His firm also completed the Harris County Astrodome in Houston. Projects underway at the time of the interview include Houston port authority, Bonner Elementary School in Houston and several schools in Dallas. He describes his architectural aesthetic, which includes a fondness for circles and curves. Chase describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon his life.

Video Oral History Interview with John S. Chase, Section A2004\_223\_001\_005, TRT: 0:22:05 ?

John Chase met his wife at a wedding in Austin, Texas. At the time of the interview, they were approaching their fifty-fourth wedding anniversary. They have three children, John S. Chase III, HistoryMaker Anthony Ray Chase and Saundria Chase Gray, who all have embarked on successful careers as attorneys. The family continues its tradition of taking annual trips together to faraway places, including France and Italy. Viola Hall Chase, his mother, passed away before witnessing the extent of his success, but Chase stayed in contact with his sister, Laura Chase Farley. He frequently visits Lewistown, Pennsylvania to see her and her family. Chase describes how he hopes to be remembered, reflects upon his legacy and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.