

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorothy Fields

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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>	Fields, Dorothy, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 17, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:57:59).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Archivist Dorothy Fields (1942 - ) founded The Black Archives, History & Research Foundation of South Florida. She has helped preserve the history of African American communities in Miami, and successfully restored the landmark Lyric Theater located in Overtown, Florida. Fields was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 17, 2006, in Miami, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_024
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Archivist Dorothy Fields was born on December 31, 1942 in Miami, Florida. She was raised as an only child in the African American neighborhood of Overtown, formerly known as Colored Town. The family then purchased property in the Brown Subdivision of Miami. Fields attended Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School and Booker T. Washington High School. In high school, Fields was a member of the concert and marching band, and excelled in journalism.

In 1960, Fields graduated from Booker T. Washington High School. The following year, she enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, as an art major. As a freshman, Fields participated in the 1960 march with Dr. King to desegregate Rich's department store in downtown Atlanta. Upon completion in a student exchange program at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, Fields earned her B.F.A degree in art from Spelman College in 1964. After graduation, Fields worked as a school librarian, reading teacher and educational specialist for Miami-Dade County Public Schools for 40 years.

In 1974, Fields then received her M.A. degree in curriculum and instruction through a local outreach program out of the University of Northern Colorado. In that same year, in preparation for the nation's bicentennial, Fields began a search for information from which curriculum materials could be developed on the black experience in South Florida. Fields was unable to find any information about South Florida's black history in any school or public library. From this experience Fields established The Black Archives, History and Research Foundation, a photographic repository containing the legacies of Miami's black community of South Florida in 1977. In the same year, Fields received a certificate from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in Archives Administration and Historic Preservation. Later, at The Union Institute and University in Cincinnati, Ohio, she earned a Ph.D. in 20th century African-American history, historic preservation, and public history.

Fields' vision was to establish a manuscript and photographic repository for the African American community of Miami. She initially began collecting oral histories from older African American residents living in the communities of Overtown and the Brown Subdivision. From her efforts, the city of Miami later designated the community of Overtown as a National Trust "Main Street" community. Overtown is officially named the Historic Overtown Folklife Village. Fields is also responsible for the successful restoration of the landmark Lyric Theater located in Overtown. Renowned artists such as Nat King Cole, Marion Anderson, Etta Moten Barnett once performed at this theater.

Fields has received numerous honors and awards for her efforts in preserving African American history and culture. She serves a member of the advisory board for the Haitian Heritage Museum, and a board member for the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens in Miami. She was also a Woodrow Wilson Teacher's Fellow at Princeton University. A life member of the association for the Study of African American Life and History she also holds membership in the Society of American Archivists and the Academy of Certified Archivists. She is a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and The Links, Incorporated.

Fields has two daughters, attorney Katherine Fields Kpehyee Marsh and historian Edda Fields-Black, author of 'Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora.'

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorothy Fields was conducted by Tracey Lewis on February 17, 2006, in Miami, Florida, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Archivist Dorothy Fields (1942 - ) founded The Black Archives, History & Research Foundation of South Florida. She has helped preserve the history of African American communities in Miami, and successfully restored the landmark Lyric Theater located in Overtown, Florida.

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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:**

Fields, Dorothy, 1942-

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Fields, Dorothy, 1942---Interviews

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Women archivists--Florida--Miami--Interviews

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African American historians--Florida--Miami--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:**

Archivist

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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 Dorothy Fields, February 17, 2006. 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 Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:04 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields was born on December 31, 1942 in Miami, Florida's Colored Town. Her maternal grandparents, Ida Roberts Johnson, and Samuel Johnson, migrated from Harbour Island, Bahamas to Key West, Florida; they settled in Colored Town and raised seven children. Field's mother, Dorothy Johnson Jenkins McKellar and her

siblings all graduated from college. McKellar's oldest brother, S.H. Johnson, attended high school at Florida Baptist Academy in Jacksonville, Florida where he roomed with Howard Thurman; Miami did not have high schools for black children. Many of her siblings conducted their high school studies at HBCUs. Field's father was raised in Dade County, Florida and attended Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama before becoming a cook on the Champion train. Her parents divorced when she was two years old, and her father died on Champion's train wreck in 1953. Fields describes naming conventions in her family and her family's move to Brown Sub, Florida. She also talks about her childhood education.

Women archivists--Florida--Miami--Interviews.

African American historians--Florida--Miami--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:42 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields describes being a student at Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School in Miami, Florida's Colored Town and her failing grade in physical education. A few of her maternal relatives taught at the school including her mother, Dorothy Johnson Jenkins McKellar, and her aunt, Roberta Johnson Thompson; Fields' maternal family was close-knit. Fields then attended Booker T. Washington High School in Miami, Florida where she benefitted from teachers like Marian Shannon (ph.) and Blanche Dean (ph.). She describes the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood in Colored Town and the neighborhood's Bahamian-style architecture. Fields also talks about her childhood memories and her maternal relatives' involvement in Greek fraternities and sororities. Around 1953, Field's mother enrolled at Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. Fields describes her experiences of Boston, Massachusetts and New York after moving north. In Massachusetts, Fields attended Camp Atwater, a historically black summer camp.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:56 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields describes formative experiences at Booker T. Washington High School in Miami, Florida. She also

talks about her experience of segregation in the South and her participation in an intergroup youth council for black and white students. Fields went on to attend Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia where her contemporaries included Alice Walker, Herschelle Sullivan Challenor, and HistoryMaker Marian Wright Edleman. At Spelman, Fields became active in the Civil Rights Movement through one of her teachers, HistoryMaker Christine King Farris. Fields met Farris' brother, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while participating in demonstrations in Atlanta, including a protest at Rich's Department Store. Fields recalls Spelman's conservative environment and Spelman president Dr. Albert Manley's view of student involvement in the Movement. Fields talks about her exchange student experience at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts and why she did not pursue graduate studies in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:38 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields worked in the school library as a student at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, developing an interest in library sciences. Before graduating from Spelman in 1964, she attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts as an exchange student. She then worked as a teacher in a federal color awareness program in Miami, Florida; the purpose of the program was to train white teachers to interact with black colleagues and students. Fields then transferred to Myrtle Grove Elementary in Miami Gardens. She describes her experiences of racial discrimination as well as her marriage to Eddie Fields in 1966. In 1974, Fields began to research the history of blacks in Miami, Florida; the only record she found was a record of obituaries. Through her research, Fields met Thelma Peters and Arva Moore Parks McCabe, and began working at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. Fields talks about the founders of the City of Miami and her graduate studies in the University of Oklahoma's outreach program.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:54 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields describes her journey in the preservation

of African American history and culture in Miami, Florida while working at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida in Miami. In 1977, Fields attended a summer program in archives administration and historic preservation at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Although Fields attempted to place Miami's Booker T. Washington High School on the National Register of Historic Places, she was falsely informed that schools could not become part of the Register. Fields talks about her research into black ancestry in Florida, and assembling her first board of directors after establishing the Black Archives Foundation in 1977. She talks about the displacement of black residents in Miami's Colored Town community due to the construction of Florida's I-95 expressway and the racial discrimination in Downtown Miami that led her uncle to move his medical practice in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Fields, Section  
A2006\_024\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:45 2006/02/17

Dorothy Fields talks about the impact of Florida's I-95 expressway on the cultural atmosphere of Miami's Colored Town. She recounts her discovery of Miami's Lyric Theater, the theater's history, and her purchase of the property in 1988, which became the home of the Black Archives and also a part of the National Register of Historic Places. Fields talks about restoration and preservation efforts at the Lyric Theater and shares her vision for the Historic Overtown Folk Life District. She also recalls writing a last minute response to an RFP for Florida International University in Miami, Florida. Fields began doctoral studies in her fifties through an outreach program of Union Institute & University in Miami-Dade County, Florida. She concludes her interview by describing her two daughters and her mentor, John Hope Franklin.