

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with June Dobbs Butts

---

## 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>	Butts, June Dobbs
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with June Dobbs Butts,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 13, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:56:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Psychology professor and sexologist June Dobbs Butts (1928 - ) was the first African American woman to work on the staff of the renowned Masters & Johnson Institute. Butts was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_076
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Therapist and family counselor June Dobbs Butts was born on June 11, 1928 in Atlanta, Georgia. She is the youngest daughter of Irene and John Wesley Dobbs, one of Atlanta's most prominent African American leaders before the Civil Rights Movement. Butts is also the aunt of the late Honorable Maynard Jackson, Atlanta's first black mayor. Butts received her B.A. degree in sociology from Spelman College in 1948, setting a national education record – six sisters graduating from the same college. That same summer, Butts worked with her close friend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Then, in the fall of 1948, she entered the Teacher's College of Columbia University in New York City, where she received

her Ed.D. degree in family life education.

Butts' professional career began in 1950 as a professor in the psychology department at Fisk University. She went on to work at Tennessee State University, Howard University College of Medicine and Meharry Medical College, where she was also a researcher. While serving on the Board of Directors of Planned Parenthood in the 1970s, Butts met famed sex researchers, Masters and Johnson, who invited her to join their staff at the Reproductive Biology Research Foundation (later called Masters and Johnson Institute) in St. Louis, Missouri. There, Butts became the first African American to be trained as a sex therapist by Masters and Johnson. She later served as a visiting scientist at CDC (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention) in Atlanta.

Butts authored four book chapters on human sexuality and wrote several articles in popular magazines. Her insightful articles include *Ebony* magazine's first feature piece on human sexuality, "Sex Education: Who Needs It?," which was published in 1977. She was also the author of "Sex and the Modern Black Couple", which appeared in *Ebony* in 1991; "Why Some People Consider Celibacy", in *Jet* magazine in 1997; and "Spirituality and Sex: A Program for Women in Alcoholism Recovery", which appeared in the *American Journal of Health Studies* in 2001. From 1980 to 1982, Butts authored *Essence* magazine's most popular monthly column, "Sexual Health."

Butts resides in Atlanta and is completing her autobiography. She is the mother of three children (one deceased), and one granddaughter.

June Dobbs Butts was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 13, 2006.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with June Dobbs Butts was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 13, 2006, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Psychology professor and sexologist June Dobbs Butts (1928 - ) was the first African American woman to work on the staff of the renowned Masters & Johnson Institute.

---

## 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®.

---

## **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.

---

## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Butts, June Dobbs

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Butts, June Dobbs --Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## **Occupations:**

Psychology Professor

---

Sexologist

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers|MedicalMakers

---

## **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 June Dobbs Butts, April 13, 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).

---

## 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.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with June Dobbs Butts, Section  
A2006\_076\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 2006/04/13

June Dobbs Butts was born on June 11, 1928 in Atlanta, Georgia to Irene Thompson Dobbs and John Wesley Dobbs. Her mother was the third child born to the Irish barber Kelly Thompson, who worked at Atlanta's Kimball House Hotel, and Mattie Thompson, who was African American. Butts' father was raised on a farm by his grandparents, and eventually joined his mother, Minnie Hendricks Banks, who worked in Savannah, Georgia. He attended Atlanta Baptist College for two years, and then worked for the post office. Her father was denied his retirement pension until he appealed to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He also served as the grand master of Prince Hall Freemasonry for twenty-nine years. Butts celebrated her fourth birthday with the residents of the Masonic Orphans Home in Americus, Georgia. She grew up in Atlanta, and attended Oglethorpe Elementary School and Atlanta University Laboratory High School. Butts was the younger sister of opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, and admired aviator Amelia Earhart.

Video Oral History Interview with June Dobbs Butts, Section  
A2006\_076\_001\_002, TRT: 0:27:10 2006/04/13

June Dobbs Butts was a childhood friend of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his siblings. Butts attended the private Oglethorpe Elementary School and Atlanta University Laboratory High School, where she first noticed racial discrimination, and also aspired to become a teacher. She graduated a year early from Booker T.

Washington High School, and enrolled at her sisters' alma mater, Spelman College. Butts served as the class president, and graduated with honors in 1948. She earned a master's degree at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York City in one year, and then pursued her doctorate until her mother called her home. Moving to Nashville, Tennessee, Butts taught psychology at Fisk University and Tennessee State University, and conducted studies of infants at Meharry Medical College. She married Hugh F. Butts in 1953. Butts recalls her father's anger at the murders of African Americans in Atlanta during the riots of 1906, and his experiences of discrimination as a railroad postal clerk.

Video Oral History Interview with June Dobbs Butts, Section A2006\_076\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:40 2006/04/13

June Dobbs Butts continued her doctoral studies in family life education at Columbia University's Teachers College in New York City, where celebrity therapist Ruth Westheimer was her classmate. Butts met psychologists William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson at a Planned Parenthood conference, and later worked with Johnson on the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States. In the 1980s, Butts worked as a sex therapist under Masters and Johnson, who conducted pioneering studies of human sexuality at Washington University in St. Louis. She was the only African American woman in the field at that time. Butts eventually left to teach at Howard University, and studied African American adolescent sexuality, until her funding was eliminated in favor of abstinence-only sexual education research. Butts became an alcoholic in the 1980s, and sought help in 1988 upon realizing her son, Eric Butts, also had a drinking problem. She also recalls meeting Joycelyn Elders, the first black surgeon general.

Video Oral History Interview with June Dobbs Butts, Section A2006\_076\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:00 2006/04/13

June Dobbs Butts worked as a consultant for Sweden's HIV prevention program while visiting her sister, Mattiwilda Dobbs Janzon, there in 1987. Upon returning to Washington, D.C., she joined the Commission of Public Health, where her suggestions for HIV prevention were

ignored by the commissioner. However, she remained committed to improving sexual education, despite the criticism of friends and family. When Dr. David Satcher, Butts' former colleague at Meharry Medical College, was appointed as the director of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, he hired her as a visiting research scientist. She also taught courses on sexuality and addiction at Morehouse College and the Interdenominational Theological Center. Butts agreed with Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders about comprehensive sexual education, but disagreed with her view that drugs should be legal. Butts describes her private therapy practice, and her plan to write an autobiography. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.