

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Yosef ben-Jochannan

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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>	Ben-Jochannan, Yosef
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Yosef ben-Jochannan,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 5, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:58:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Africana studies professor Yosef ben-Jochannan (1918 - 2015 ) served as an adjunct professor at Cornell University. He wrote over forty-nine books and papers, including 'Black Man of the Nile and His Family,' and, 'Africa: Mother of Western Civilizations.' Ben-Jochannan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 5, 2006, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_128
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Africana studies professor Yosef Alfredo Antonio ben-Jochannan was born on December 31, 1918 in Ethiopia to a Puerto Rican woman, Julia Matta and an Ethiopian man, Kriston ben-Jochannan. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to St. Croix, part of the United States Virgin Islands, where he grew up as an only child. ben-Jochannan attended the Christian Stead School in St. Croix, Virgin Islands. After graduation from high school in 1936, ben-Jochannan attended the University of Puerto Rico where, in 1938, he received his B.S. degree in engineering. During that summer, ben-Jochannan's father sent him to Ethiopia to study firsthand the ancient history of African people. He returned home and received his M.A. degree in anthropology from the University of Havana in 1939. ben-Jochannan held a Ph.D. degree in cultural anthropology from the University of Havana. In 1940, ben-Jochannan immigrated to the United States and worked as senior draftsman for architecture firm, Emery Roth & Sons, in New York City. Seven years later, he began leading tour groups to Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. He led the groups twice a year for several decades. ben-Jochannan's teaching career began in 1950 at Malcolm-King Harlem College and City College of New York in New York City. In 1976, he became an adjunct professor at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. ben-Jochannan had worked closely with other notable Africana studies scholars including John Henrik Clarke, Edward Scobie, and Leonard Jeffries. ben-Jochannan had written and published over forty-nine books and papers including, *We the Black Jews*, *Black Man of the Nile and His Family*, and *Africa: Mother of Major Western Religions*.

ben-Jochannan passed away on March 19, 2015 at age 96.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Yosef ben-Jochannan was conducted by Denise Gines on November 5, 2006,

in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Africana studies professor Yosef ben-Jochannan (1918 - 2015 ) served as an adjunct professor at Cornell University. He wrote over forty-nine books and papers, including 'Black Man of the Nile and His Family,' and, 'Africa: Mother of Western Civilizations.'

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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:

Ben-Jochannan, Yosef

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ben-Jochannan, Yosef--Interviews

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African American historians--Interviews

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African American college teachers--Interviews

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Tour guides (Persons)--Egypt--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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Cornell University

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## Occupations:

Africana Studies Professor

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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 Yosef ben-Jochannan, November 5, 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 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 Yosef ben-Jochannan, Section A2006\_128\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:47 ?

Yosef ben-Jochannan was born on December 31, 1918 in Ethiopia to Julia Matta and Kriston ben-Jochannan. His mother was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and studied at a university in Spain. Ben-Jochannan's father was raised in Ethiopia, where he attended college. His father later became a trade representative for the Ethiopian government. Ben-Jochannan's parents met in Spain, where his father pulled his mother out of the way of a galloping horse. She asked that he marry her, as he had touched her, which was against the customs of the time. They were married at the Suez Canal. After ben-Jochannan, their only surviving child, was born, they lived briefly in Ethiopia, Brazil and Cuba. Ben-Jochannan grew up in St. Croix and Puerto Rico, where he played many sports, including cricket. Attending a desegregated school in St. Croix, he was mentored by his teacher, Mr. Thurland, who taught him the trade of furniture making. Ben-Jochannan also worked as a bookkeeper for his father, a lawyer and property owner.

Families, Black--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Parents--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Business Enterprises, Black--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Blacks--Education (Secondary)--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Landowners--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Sugarcane--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

Immigrants--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix--20th century.

Academic writing.

Video Oral History Interview with Yosef ben-Jochannan, Section A2006\_128\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Yosef ben-Jochannan's family included many entrepreneurs, like his father, Kriston ben-Jochannan. In contrast, ben-Jochannan studied history and anthropology at the University of Puerto Rico. He graduated in 1938; and, after an argument with his father, moved to New York City's Harlem neighborhood in 1940. He lived with his maternal uncle, Casper Holstein, who operated Harlem's numbers game. Through his uncle, ben-Jochannan found work as a draftsman for architects in New York, including Edward Durell Stone. He went on to work with the governments of Zanzibar and Tanzania at the United Nations. Ben-Jochannan began his academic career at City College of New York, where he taught alongside Leonard Jeffries, Jr. He later taught at Malcolm-King College and Cornell University. After he realized that Ethiopia's Hebrew Falassa tribe was unknown in the United States, ben-Jochannan wrote 'We the Black Jews,' and appeared on television shows like 'Positively Black' and Gil Noble's 'Like It Is' to advocate for his book.

Students, Black--Education (Secondary)--Virgin Islands of the United States--Saint Croix.

College students, Black--Education (Higher)--Puerto Rico.

University of Puerto Rico (1903-1966).

Immigrants--New York (State)--New York--20th century.

Negro leagues--New York (State)--New York.

Drafters--New York (State)--New York.

College teachers, Black--New York (State).

City University of New York. City College--Faculty.

Cornell University--Faculty.

Jews, Ethiopian.

Grandparents--Ethiopia.

Noble, Gil.

Video Oral History Interview with Yosef ben-Jochannan, Section A2006\_128\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:08 ?

Yosef ben-Jochannan belonged to the Jewish faith; spoke Hebrew; and attended the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City. In 1947, he led a trip to Africa for the first time, and visited Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. Ben-Jochannan continued these trips for decades, organizing at least two each year, and bringing nearly one thousand people in total. He hired guides to take parties of up to fifty people to sites of African civilization like Giza and Saqqara, Egypt. Ben-Jochannan recalls the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but did not consider them especially significant due his belief that no individual's death is more important than any other. In 1972, he published his book, 'Black Man of the Nile and His Family,' which detailed the role of African peoples in Egyptian civilization. Ben-Jochannan went on to write dozens of books, including 'The Need for a Black Bible' and 'Africa: Mother of Western Civilization,' which describes Africa's role in world civilization.

Jews--New York (State)--New York.

Americans--Travel--Africa.

Tour guides (Persons)--Africa.

Religions--Relations.

Christianity and other religions--Islam.

Christianity and other religions--Judaism.

Race relations--Religious aspects.

Black theology.

Africana studies--Research.

Video Oral History Interview with Yosef ben-Jochannan, Section A2006\_128\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Yosef ben-Jochannan taught African studies alongside such professors as John Henrik Clarke at Cornell University's Africana Studies and Research Center, and Edward Scobie and Leonard Jeffries, Jr. at the City College of New York. He befriended Sylvia Woods, the owner of Sylvia's Restaurant in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, and brought her gifts from Africa after each of his trips. Although ben-Jochannan was not Christian, Woods personally invited him to attend the funeral of her husband, Herbert Woods, at Abyssinian Baptist Church. Ben-Jochannan describes his conviction that all religions are equally worthy of respect, as well as other opinions that he reached later in life, including his acceptance of same-sex marriage, and his belief that there are no natural differences in intelligence between women and men. Ben-Jochannan also reflects upon his life; how he raised his children and grandchildren; and his hopes for the African American community.

Religions--Relations.

Christianity and other religions--Islam.

Christianity and other religions--Judaism.

Blacks--Conduct of life.

Belief and doubt.

Remorse.

Blacks--Marriage--United States.

Jeffries, Leonard.

Scobie, Edward.

Clarke, John Henrik, 1915-1998.