

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jack T. Franklin

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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>	Franklin, Jack T., 1922-2009
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jack T. Franklin,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 20, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:43:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer Jack T. Franklin (1922 - 2009 ) began his career as a freelancer in the 1950s. He worked for African American publications such as The Philadelphia Tribune, Ebony, and Jet. He also worked as a photographer for the United States Army Signal Corps Photographic Center during the 1940s and 1950s. Franklin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 20, 2006, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_184
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Photographer Jack T. Franklin was born on May 7, 1922, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Frank and Florence Collier Franklin. Frank Franklin, originally from Georgia, was a school principal who often gave Jack and his two siblings music lessons on the piano. Franklin's mother, Florence, was a normal school graduate and a prominent social figure in Philadelphia's African American community. Following Frank Franklin's death, she became a practical nurse and a hair dresser. In 1933, Franklin's sister, Eloise, gave him a Brownie camera for his

eleventh birthday. Franklin began taking photographs of everything and everyone he knew. His sister, an accomplished opera singer, remained one of his favorite subjects.

After graduating from Simon Gratz High School, Franklin joined the United States Army, where he was assigned to the U.S. Army Signal Corps Photographic Center, now called the U.S. Army Pictorial Service. African Americans were not allowed to serve in this unit at that time, but Franklin's race was often misidentified. In the 1950s, Franklin received an honorable discharge and began his career as a freelance photographer. He took photographs for several African American publications including the "Philadelphia Tribune," the "Pittsburgh Courier," "Ebony" and "Jet" magazines. He also worked as a photographer and darkroom technician for Philadelphia's Merlin Studios. During the early 1960s, he photographed many African American performers including Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Patti LaBelle and Sam Cooke.

During the mid to late 1960s, Franklin used his camera to chronicle the Civil Rights Movement in Philadelphia and throughout the South. He captured the March on Washington and the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. He also photographed renowned figures such as Thurgood Marshall, Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali), Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Sidney Poitier, Julie and Harry Beafonte, James Baldwin, and Sammy Davis, Jr. In 2002, his work was featured in an Exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution entitled "Reflections in Black." Franklin's entire body of work, which consists of over 400,000 negatives and vintage prints is housed at the African American Museum in downtown Philadelphia. He received several awards, including being named one of the most important living photographers in America by "CBS Sunday Morning."

Jack T. Franklin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 20, 2006. Jack T. Franklin died on September 25, 2009.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jack T. Franklin was conducted by Shawn Wilson on December 20, 2006, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Jack T. Franklin (1922 - 2009 ) began his career as a freelancer in the 1950s. He worked for African American publications such as The Philadelphia Tribune, Ebony, and Jet. He also worked as a photographer for the United States Army Signal Corps Photographic Center during the 1940s and 1950s.

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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:

Franklin, Jack T., 1922-2009

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Photographer

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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 Jack T. Franklin, December 20, 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

## 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 Jack T. Franklin, Section  
A2006\_184\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:32 2006/12/20

Jack T. Franklin was born on May 7, 1922 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Florence Collier Franklin and Frank Franklin. His maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Collier, was a Native American from Florida, where both of Franklin's parents were born. In Florida, his mother was a schoolteacher, and his father was a principal. The two married, and moved to Philadelphia with Franklin's maternal grandmother in search of better employment. His mother became a seamstress and housewife, while his father worked for the post office, until he passed away when Franklin was five years old. Franklin's interest in photography began when his sister, Eloise Owens Strothers, bought him his first camera at the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. Franklin became a self-taught photographer of his Philadelphia neighborhood. He attended Philadelphia's Michael Arnold School, James L. Claghorn School and Simon Gratz High School. While in school, Franklin earned money by taking out his neighbors' trash.

African American families--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.  
Segregation--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack T. Franklin, Section  
A2006\_184\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:26 2006/12/20

Jack T. Franklin attended the segregated Simon Gratz High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While in school, he photographed his all-black neighborhood; worked at Ling's Studio; and displayed his work at exhibits in the white community. He also served as a staff photographer for three of Philadelphia's African American newspapers. During this time, Franklin mostly used Speed Graphic and Minolta cameras. Upon graduating from high school, Franklin was drafted to the U.S. Army, and served in a photography unit. His fellow soldiers did not realize that he was African American, and thought he had only Native American ancestry. After leaving the U.S. Army, Franklin returned to Philadelphia, and opened a photography studio to document the history of the city. At Philadelphia's Uptown Theater, he photographed performers like Sam Cooke and The Shirelles. In addition to Philadelphia's music community, much of Franklin's work portrayed the Civil Rights Movement, including the March on Washington.

African American high school students.

United States. Army--African American troops.

Discrimination in the military--United States.

African American photographers.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack T. Franklin, Section  
A2006\_184\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:52 2006/12/20

Jack T. Franklin photographed the Civil Rights Movement in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and throughout the United States. He documented the March on Washington in 1963, and the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. In Philadelphia, Franklin photographed the demonstrations against segregation at Girard College, and for employment rights at Strawberry Mansion Junior High School. During this time, he also photographed musicians such as Sammy Davis, Jr., Harry Belafonte and James Brown at Philadelphia's Uptown Theater. Franklin was concerned with documenting the lives of ordinary people as well, and often photographed births, celebrations and deaths in the African American community. In 1973, Franklin and his colleagues, Clarence Farmer, Sr. and Rowena Stewart, founded the Afro-American Historical and Cultural

Museum in Philadelphia to create an institution for African American art. Franklin's photography collection was housed at the museum, which later became known as the African American Museum in Philadelphia.

Civil rights movements--United States--History.

Civil rights demonstrations--Washington (D.C.)--History--20th century.

Girard College.

Civil rights demonstrations--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.

Civil rights demonstrations--Alabama.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., 1963.

Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965: Selma, Ala.).

African American Museum in Philadelphia.

Video Oral History Interview with Jack T. Franklin, Section A2006\_184\_001\_004, TRT: 0:16:17 2006/12/20

Jack T. Franklin photographed the Selma to Montgomery March and other civil rights events throughout the country. Franklin and his fellow photographers sometimes avoided the violence that occurred at demonstrations, but there were numerous occasions when Franklin was sprayed with hoses, and beaten by the police. Franklin's work was influenced by African American photographers G. Marshall Wilson and John W. Mosley, although their photographs portrayed personalities, whereas Franklin's own work focused on events. At the time of the interview, Franklin had recently married his partner of fifty-two years. He describes how he would like to be remembered; his advice to aspiring photographers; and his hopes for the African American photography community. Franklin concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Photography--Vocational guidance.

African Americans--Marriage.