

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dabney N. Montgomery

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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>	Montgomery, Dabney N., 1923-2016
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 7, 2007 and February 5, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	12 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:25:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	City government employee, tuskegee airman, and civil rights activist Dabney N. Montgomery (1923 - 2016 ) was a social services investigator in the Department of Social Services and for the New York Housing Authority. Montgomery was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 7, 2007 and February 5, 2008, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_226
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Tuskegee Airman Dabney N. Montgomery was born on April 18, 1923 in Selma, Alabama to Lula Anderson Montgomery and Dred Montgomery. He attended the Alabama Lutheran Academy and then Selma University High School, graduating in 1941. After high school, he joined the U.S. Army and was sent for basic training at Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi. After that, Montgomery was sent to Quartermaster Training School at Camp Lee, Virginia (outside of Petersburg), where he received special training in supplies.

In 1943, Montgomery of the 1051st Quartermaster Company of the 96th Air Service Group, attached to the 332nd Air Fighter Group was deployed to Italy. He served there until the end of World War II. In 1946, after returning to the United States, Montgomery entered Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina. Montgomery became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and graduated with his B.A. degree in religious education in 1949. Between 1949 and 1950, he returned to Livingstone College and acquired thirty hours in economic study. He briefly studied economics at the University of Michigan and Wayne State University before going to Boston, Massachusetts, where he enrolled at the Boston Conservatory of Music, studying dance. Montgomery later studied dance with the New York City Metropolitan Opera Dance School before an injury forced him to end his career. In 1955, he began working for the city, first as a Social Service Investigator in the Department of Social Services and later for the Housing Authority. He retired in 1988.

Montgomery passed away on September 3, 2016.

Montgomery was heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement. He participated in marches in New York City and in the 1963 March on Washington. In 1965, Montgomery was one of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s bodyguards on the historic Selma to Montgomery march.

Since his retirement, Montgomery has worked as a Social Outreach Worker for Project FIND, a non-profit organization assisting older adults on Manhattan's West Side. Montgomery is also very active with Harlem's

Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which is the oldest organized black church in New York, founded in 1796. Montgomery is also active on the Parks Committee and Harlem's Interfaith Committee of the Tenth Community Board of Manhattan.

Montgomery has been married to his wife, Amelia Montgomery, for thirty-seven years (as of 2007). They have no children.

Montgomery was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 7, 2007.

Montgomery passed away on September 3, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dabney N. Montgomery was conducted by Adrienne Jones and Larry Crowe on August 7, 2007 and February 5, 2008, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 12 Betacame SP videocassettes. City government employee, tuskegee airman, and civil rights activist Dabney N. Montgomery (1923 - 2016 ) was a social services investigator in the Department of Social Services and for the New York Housing Authority.

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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:

Montgomery, Dabney N., 1923-2016

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Montgomery, Dabney N., 1923-2016 --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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New York City Housing Authority.

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United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

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### **Occupations:**

City Government Employee

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Tuskegee Airman

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Civil Rights Activist

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### **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|MilitaryMakers

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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 Dabney N. Montgomery, August 7, 2007 and February 5, 2008. 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 Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery was born on April 18, 1923 in Selma, Alabama to Lula Anderson Montgomery and Dred Montgomery. His father was the grandson of Union Army soldier Joe Montgomery, who once threatened to shoot General Ulysses Grant for smoking too close to an armory. Montgomery's mother was born to sharecroppers in Alberta, Alabama, where she attended the Welcome A.M.E. Zion Church. She married Montgomery's father after the death of his first wife, Minnie Montgomery. Montgomery's father had one child from his previous marriage, boxer Joe Montgomery, who often trained with Montgomery near their home in Selma. Montgomery also spent time with his paternal aunt, Hattie Montgomery, who passed down the family's stories. Montgomery's father was hired as a trackman on the Southern Railway, and eventually became an engine fireman. He worked on the railroad for forty years, and sustained permanent damage to the left side of his face because of its proximity to the engine's fire.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery's father, Dred Montgomery, raised six children, of whom Montgomery was the fourth born, in a strict household in Selma, Alabama. They attended Selma's Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, and were forbidden from dancing or playing cards. Because his father was a fireman on the Southern Railway and a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Montgomery's family was middle class. They lived in a poor, all-black area, and were the first household on their street to have a telephone and indoor bathroom. Montgomery was close to his mother, Lula Anderson Montgomery, who died when he was fourteen years old. His oldest brother, Mitchel Montgomery, was protective of his younger siblings, including Clyde Montgomery and Esther Montgomery. Years later, Montgomery joined Selma's civil rights protests alongside his older sister, Fairrow Belle Montgomery Prewitt. She was a friend of Viola Liuzzo, a white woman who was shot and killed for her role in the Selma to Montgomery March.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery grew up in a close-knit community in Selma, Alabama,

where education was emphasized. He began his education at Selma's Alabama Lutheran Academy, where he received strong discipline. He enjoyed religious studies, and sometimes struggled with his other coursework. He was the only student in his class from the fifth to seventh grades, and skipped the eighth grade in order to enroll at Selma University's high school, where his classmates were often college students. During this time, Montgomery became more involved at the Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, where he taught Sunday school. His pastor encouraged him to become a minister, but Montgomery did not feel called to do so; and, instead, decided to study religion at Livingston College in Salisbury, North Carolina. In addition, Montgomery talks about the church's role as a sanctuary for the members of Selma's black community, who experienced frequent racial discrimination in the segregated city.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery received a high school diploma in 1941 from Selma University, and continued to study there until 1943, when he was drafted into the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was inducted at Fort Benning in Georgia, and then transferred to Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training. Montgomery went on to receive clerical training at Camp Lee in Virginia and in Oscoda, Michigan, where he was assigned to the 1051st Quartermaster Service Group Aviation Company. Before his deployment, he travelled by segregated train to Selma, Alabama, where he visited his family. Then, Montgomery was sent to Italy, where his company fed and outfitted the 332nd Fighter Group, a unit of Tuskegee Airmen. Montgomery admired Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and pilots Daniel "Chappie" James, Roscoe C. Brown and Lee Archer, but rarely interacted with them while isolated in the quartermaster's warehouse. Eventually, Montgomery began a Bible study group for the unit, and once served communion upon an officer's request.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery served in Italy with the 1051st Quartermaster Service Group Aviation Company during World War II. The African American soldiers were treated with respect by the Europeans; and, after the Tuskegee Airmen's Red Tails developed a reputation for protecting bomber planes, the white American soldiers became less discriminatory as well. Montgomery witnessed the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1944; and, upon his discharge in 1945, returned to the United States. He was forced to use a segregated entrance to board the train from Georgia to Selma, Alabama, where he attempted to register to vote, and was denied because he did not own land. Montgomery left Selma to enroll at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he studied religion. Under the mentorship of seminary dean John H. Satterwhite, Montgomery considered entering the ministry, and felt called to return to Alabama to peacefully resist segregation. However, he decided to study economics instead.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery studied economics for a time at Livingstone College and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, but eventually left to train as a ballet dancer at the Boston Conservatory of Music in Massachusetts. There, he attended the Union United Methodist Church, and met Coretta Scott King and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After Montgomery broke his foot, he stopped dancing, and began a tour of Africa and Europe. He met a Spanish

woman named Maria Bonia, who accepted his proposal of marriage, although her father refused. After touring abroad, Montgomery moved to New York City, where he studied at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School until suffering a dislocated spine. At that time, he returned to Selma, Alabama, where he preached about peaceful resistance at the Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church; and, in an act of civil disobedience, drank from a white water fountain at the police station. Fearing a reprisal, his father told the police chief that Montgomery was experiencing shellshock.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_001\_007, TRT: 0:13:01 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_002\_008, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery attended Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He was influenced by seminary dean John H. Satterwhite; and saw a performance by Paul Robeson, with whom he later participated in civil rights demonstrations. During his studies, Montgomery felt compelled to return to the Alabama to protest segregation. However, he feared for his life; and, upon graduating, studied economics at Livingstone College, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Detroit's Wayne State University. After failing to complete a degree, he decided to become a ballet teacher, and enrolled in dance classes at the Boston Conservatory of Music. Upon injuring his foot, he toured North Africa and southern Europe, and then moved to New York City to enroll at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School. He participated in the smaller march on Washington, D.C. in 1957, as well as the March on Washington of 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_002\_009, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery met Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while studying ballet in Boston, Massachusetts during the early 1950s. In 1953, Montgomery began a tour of North Africa and Europe. He saw visions of angels in Greece, during a concert by the City of Athens Symphony Orchestra and Choir; and returned to the United States with renewed faith in nonviolent resistance. After an injury forced him to give up ballet, Montgomery moved to his hometown of Selma, Alabama, where his acts of civil disobedience led to threats from the police. At his father's request, Montgomery left the South to live in New York City. Montgomery also remembers his engagement to Maria Bonia, whom he met on the island of Majorca in Spain. Her father refused to allow them to marry, and they lost touch until the early 2000s, when Bonia spoke on the phone with Montgomery and his wife, Amelia Neely Montgomery. In 2005, Bonia visited the couple in New York City, and explained her late father's regrets about halting the marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_002\_010, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery returned in 1953 to Selma, Alabama, where he intended to protest against segregation. He initially stayed with a Sunday school teacher, until she asked him to move to a hotel for her safety. Montgomery preached about integration and nonviolent resistance at the Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, and then set out to disobey the laws on segregation, but found that the local bus station and drug store were closed. He decided to drink from a white water fountain at the police station, and was caught and brought to his father's home. Montgomery's father, Dred Montgomery, told the police chief that his

son was suffering from shellshock, and asked Montgomery to leave Selma. He returned to New York City until 1965, when he heard about the attacks against protestors at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. He took leave from his job at the welfare department, and returned to participate in the second Selma to Montgomery March alongside his sister, Fairrow Belle Montgomery Prewitt.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_002\_011, TRT: 0:29:05 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery took part in Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s second Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. The protestors met at the First Baptist Church of Selma, where they agreed to remain nonviolent during the demonstration. Anticipating violence from whites, Montgomery volunteered to serve as Dr. King's bodyguard, and walked near Dr. King during the march. Afterwards, he returned to New York City, where he lived in Harlem near Lewis Michaux's African National Memorial Bookstore and historian John Henrik Clarke's home. Montgomery witnessed the changes in the neighborhood as it became wealthier and more racially diverse. He was a member of Harlem's Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where he served as the historian. Montgomery describes the history of the church, and remembers seeing African Methodist Episcopal Zion Bishop Alfred G. Dunston at the Selma to Montgomery March. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dabney N. Montgomery, Section A2007\_226\_002\_012, TRT: 0:16:49 ?

Dabney N. Montgomery met his wife, Amelia Neely Montgomery, at the Mother African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in New York City. They became friends, and married in 1971. With his wife's encouragement, Montgomery joined the Claude B. Gouan Tri-State Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. in the 1990s, and became active in the organization. Montgomery also talks about his paternal ancestors, including Buffalo Soldier Joe Montgomery; and his paternal aunt, Hattie Montgomery. He describes how he would like to be remembered, and shares his memorabilia from the second Selma to Montgomery March in 1965.