

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Verna Holley

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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>	Holley, Verna
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Verna Holley,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 29, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:57:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	High school music teacher and choral director Verna Holley (1936 - ) served as the fine arts director at J.W. Sexton High School in Lansing, Michigan and worked in the Lansing Public School System until she retired. She was also the pianist and music director of the Earl Nelson Singers. Holley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 29, 2008, in Lansing, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_039
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired choral music teacher Verna Dorsey Holley was born on April 29, 1936 in Detroit, Michigan to Pearl Richardson Dorsey and Henry Dorsey. Holley attended Dwyer Elementary School in 1948 before graduating from Northern High School in 1952. Holley completed her B.A. degree in music education at Wayne State University in 1956 and went on to earn her M.A. degree in music at Michigan State University.

Holley was hired as the fine arts director at J.W. Sexton High School in Lansing, Michigan and worked in the Lansing Public School System until she retired. She then continued to give piano lessons in her home. Holley became the pianist and music director of the Earl Nelson Singers. Founded in 1963, by Earl Nelson, The Earl Nelson Singers Company is an integrated ensemble of singers from the Lansing, Michigan area. As the company's musical director, Holley selects the sacred songs of slaves for them to perform. The group's repertoire included songs reflective of the early "gospel" style. Holley's work has also been associated with the Okemos String Program.

Holley is a member of the Religious Conference Planning Association, United Conference for Women and the Capital Area Music Teachers Association. She lives in Lansing, Michigan with her husband, Melvin Holley. They have three adult children: Mark, Timothy and Millicent.

Holley was interviewed by 'The HistoryMakers' on February 29, 2008.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Verna Holley was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 29, 2008, in Lansing, Michigan, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. High school music teacher and choral director Verna Holley (1936 - ) served as the fine arts director at J.W. Sexton High School in Lansing, Michigan and worked in the Lansing Public School System until she retired. She was also the pianist and music director of the Earl Nelson Singers.

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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:

Holley, Verna

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Holley, Verna--Interviews

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African American music teachers--Interviews.

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African American choral conductors--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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The Earl Nelson Singers

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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MusicMakers

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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 Verna Holley, February 29, 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 2/6/2013 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, February 29, 2008

Video Oral History Interview with Verna Holley, Section A2008\_039\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:10 2008/02/29

Retired chorale music teacher, Verna Holley was born April 29, 1936 in Detroit, Michigan. Her mother's name was Pearl (née Richardson) Dorsey and she was born April 30, 1897 in Tallassee, Alabama. Her father, Henry H. Dorsey was born on September 30, 1902 in Americus, Georgia. Her maternal grandparents were General and Maddie Lee Richardson and her paternal grandparents were Henry and Matilda Dorsey. Holley began teaching in Detroit's public schools in 1956; then moved to Lansing, Michigan, where she began teaching in 1973. She taught music to elementary school students until 1979 and then went to teach junior high and high school students. Holley retired from teaching in 1993.

African American musicians--Michigan--Detroit.

African American families.

Education--Racial aspects.

African American women household employees.

African American tramps.

Video Oral History Interview with Verna Holley, Section A2008\_039\_001\_002, TRT: 0:27:40 2008/02/29

Verna Holley describes the sights, sounds and smells of growing up in Detroit, Michigan's Black Bottom. She attended Trowbridge and Dwyer Elementary School in the late 1940s before graduating from Northern High School in 1952. Holley grew up in a very strict and bible based home. She remembers that the three most important things to her parents were that her and her siblings went to school, got good grades and learned to play the piano. Her father decided that since she was taking lessons that she should play for her family's church, Bethany Tabernacle. Holley's piano teacher was also the organist at Ebenezer A.M.E. Zion Church and would help her with learning hymns. Holley stayed at Bethany Tabernacle until she moved to Lansing, when she was thirty-five, almost forty years of age.

Black Bottom (Detroit, Mich.)

Franklin, Aretha.

Detroit (Mich.)--Church history--20th century.

Detroit (Mich.)--Riot, 1943.

Piano--Instruction and study.

Video Oral History Interview with Verna Holley, Section A2008\_039\_001\_003, TRT:

0:29:00 2008/02/29

Verna Holley completed her B.A. degree in music education at Wayne State University in 1956. Following her graduation from college she secured a job at Dwyer Elementary School as music teacher, where she taught for two and a half years. Holley and her husband Melvin married in 1957 and had their first child in 1959. When she started teaching in 1956, only certain schools would allow blacks to teach at them. However when she returned to work in 1964 after giving birth to her second child, black teachers were being sent all over the city of Detroit to teach. Holley was sent to teach music at A.L. Holmes Elementary School and was the first black teacher assigned to the school.

Wayne State University.

Shirley, George.

Old Fashioned Revival Hour (Radio program).

Atwood, Rudy.

Video Oral History Interview with Verna Holley, Section A2008\_039\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/02/29

Verna Holley became the pianist and music director of the Earl Nelson Singers in 1978. Founded in 1963, by Earl Nelson, The Earl Nelson Singers Company is an integrated ensemble of singers from the Lansing, Michigan area. Holley considers her legacy to be the positive influence she has had on students. She explains that the music lessons that were instilled in her as a child are still with her as an adult and she hopes that by passing them down to her students she will have a positive influence in their lives. Holley and her husband celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in June of 2007 and have three grown children together: Mark, Timothy and Millicent.

Choirs (Music).

Spirituals (Songs).

Nelson, Earl, 1928-2008.

Dett, R. Nathaniel, 1882-1943.

Wedding anniversaries.