

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Wright

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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>	Wright, Robert Lee, 1937-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Wright,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 1, 2008
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2008
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Technology chief executive, civil rights activist, and city council member Robert Wright (1937 - ) was the founder and chairman emeritus of Dimensions International, Inc., a leading information technology and airspace management solutions provider. Wright participated in the Selma to Montgomery March, and worked in the Reagan administration after serving four terms in the Columbus, Georgia, city council. Wright was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 1, 2008, in Alexandria, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2008_077
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dimensions International, Inc., founder and chairman emeritus Robert Lee Wright was born on March 17, 1937, in Columbus, Georgia, to a bricklayer and a nurse. After graduating from high school, Wright went on to attend Ohio State University where he became classmates with future world class athletes Bob Ferguson and Mel Noel. Wright graduated in 1960 from Ohio State University

College of Optometry with his degree in optometry. He returned to Georgia where he began practicing as an optometrist.

Upon his return home to Georgia, Wright became deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1965, he participated in the Selma to Montgomery March. Then, in 1968, Wright's career interest changed to politics when he was recruited by the Republican Party to run for Columbus City Council. He won and was re-elected three times before being appointed to the position of Associate Administrator for Minority Small Business and Capital Ownership Development by President Ronald Reagan. After two years of working with the Reagan Administration, Wright resigned, and in 1985, he founded Dimensions International, Inc. Through Dimensions International, Wright began providing leading-edge technology to the government and private sector in the fields of systems engineering, information technology, and airspace management. A core subsidiary of Dimensions International is Flight Explorer, the leading provider of web-based global flight tracking information. Under Wright's leadership, Dimensions International grew to a multimillion dollar defense contractor, listed amongst *Black Enterprise's* 100.

Wright was chairman of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and of the Sub-Saharan Advisory Committee of the Export-Import Bank of the United States. Since 1999, he has been a director of Aflac, Inc. He has received many awards and recognitions, including the 2001 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award in Technology Services; the Man of the Year of the National Federation of Black Women Business Owners; the 2007 Boy Scouts of America Distinguished Citizen Award; the NAACP Achievement Award; and the Push Excellence Award.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Wright was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 1, 2008, in Alexandria, Virginia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Technology chief executive, civil rights activist, and city council member Robert Wright (1937 - ) was the founder and chairman emeritus of Dimensions International, Inc., a leading information technology and airspace management solutions provider. Wright participated in the Selma to Montgomery March, and worked in the Reagan administration after serving four terms in the Columbus, Georgia, city council.

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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:

Wright, Robert Lee, 1937-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wright, Robert Lee, 1937---Interviews

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African American executives--Interviews

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African American government executives--Interviews

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Columbus (Ga.)--Officials and employees--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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Columbus (Ohio)

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Dimensions International, Incorporated

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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City Council Member

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Technology Chief Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|PoliticalMakers|BusinessMakers

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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 Robert Wright, May 1, 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 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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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 Robert Wright, Section  
A2008\_077\_001\_001, TRT: 0:26:30 2008/05/01

Robert Wright was born on March 17, 1937 in Columbus, Georgia to Pauline Talley Wright and Robert Wright, Sr. His mother was born in 1913 in Columbus, where she was raised in a wood-framed house on 2nd Avenue by her parents, Hannah Bryant Talley and William Talley, who worked in the local post office for forty-five years. Wright's mother finished high school at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, as Columbus had no high school for

black students at the time. She graduated with a nursing degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, and several of her siblings were also college graduates. Wright's father was born in 1906 in Tuskegee, Alabama, the son of Tommy Slaughter, a plantation overseer. He learned the bricklaying trade in Tuskegee, and then moved to Columbus to work. There, Wright's parents met at a dance, married and raised their family in a house his father built. Wright's father also founded a black bricklayers' union to advocate for equal wages for African American workers.

African American executives--Interviews.

African American government executives--Interviews.

Columbus (Ga.)--Officials and employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Wright, Section  
A2008\_077\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 2008/05/01

Robert Wright's father, Robert Wright, Sr., founded a union for black bricklayers in Columbus, Georgia. Around 1950, the union merged with a local white bricklayers' union, and Wright's father became its president. Wright was raised in Wynnton, a segregated neighborhood in Columbus, and his family rented rooms to African American soldiers stationed at the nearby Fort Benning. U.S. Army officers, including General George S. Patton, pressured local authorities to ensure that black soldiers were not mistreated on base. Wright recalls watching paratrooper training, as well as minor league baseball games at Golden Park, where he saw Hank Aaron play. His parents belonged to Friendship Missionary Baptist Church, and his grandfather, William Talley, was treasurer of the nearby First African Baptist Church. Wright attended the Fifth Avenue School, where his favorite subject was science. He aspired to become a physician like his neighbors, Mary Holloway McCoo and Waymon McCoo, whose daughter was singer Marilyn McCoo.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Wright, Section  
A2008\_077\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/05/01

Robert Wright attended the Fifth Avenue School in Columbus, Georgia, and then the all-black William H. Spencer High School, where his teachers included his

aunt, Anne Hudson Dugas, and bandleader Simon Leon Brown. Wright played drums in the marching band, and belonged to the National Honor Society. He enjoyed rhythm and blues, especially the music of James Brown and Ray Charles. Wright graduated from high school in 1955, and was encouraged by his aunt to study optometry. He enrolled at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, where he experienced early setbacks, such as being assigned to remedial classes due to poor scores on his entrance examinations, and rejection from the school's marching band. However, he gained confidence with help from his first math instructor, a black graduate student. Wright lived in the Stadium Cooperative Scholarship Dormitory, and joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He also recalls his African American classmates, like basketball player Mel Nowell.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Wright, Section  
A2008\_077\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:50 2008/05/01

Robert Wright graduated from The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio in 1960. He hoped to join the U.S. military as a commissioned medical officer, but was rejected due to his childhood asthma, and instead operated an optometry practice for one year in Ohio. In the fall of 1961, Wright and his wife, June Russell Wright, returned to their hometown of Columbus, Georgia. There, he practiced optometry, and became active in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1965, he participated in the Selma to Montgomery march. In 1968, Wright partnered with Delmar Edwards to build a professional medical office, the first to be owned and operated by African American doctors in the area. On the advice of J.R. Allen, a local progressive politician, Wright joined the Republican Party, and was elected to the Columbus Council in 1970. Wright served in the council for eight years; and then, in 1980, was appointed to the U.S. Small Business Administration under President Ronald Reagan.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Wright, Section  
A2008\_077\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:00 2008/05/01

Robert Wright helped minority-owned small businesses secure government contracts as an administrator for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). After two

years, he left to found a consulting firm, Dimensions International, Inc., in 1985, and won government information technology contracts due to his experience at the SBA. Wright also founded Flight Explorer, a subsidiary company that developed a software program for the Federal Aviation Administration to track commercial air traffic. Wright's son, Russell T. Wright, succeeded him as chairman and CEO of Dimensions International, Inc., and the firm was named Black Enterprise Company of the Year in 2005. It was acquired by Honeywell International Inc. in 2007. Wright belonged to the planning commission for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and donated money to The Ohio State University and Columbus State University. He describes his hopes for the African American community, and reflects upon his family, life and legacy.