

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Amina J. Dickerson

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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>	Dickerson, Amina J., 1954-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 17, 2009
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2009
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:55:53).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Art consultant Amina J. Dickerson (1954 - ) was the director of global community involvement for the Kraft Foods Company until 2009. Dickerson also served in executive capacities with Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History and the Chicago Historical Society. Dickerson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2009_148
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art consultant Amina J. Dickerson was born Jill L. Dickerson on February 2, 1954 in Washington, D.C. to Ann Lee Stewart Dickerson and Julius James Dickerson. While in high school, Dickerson wrote a ritual play entitled, *The Journey*, which bore witness to cultural and personal transformation. Attending Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1972, Dickerson produced her play "The Journey" and then took it on tour. Her theatrical activities brought her back to Washington where she was hired as an administrator by Arena Stage.

After completing the Harvard Program in arts administration in 1974, she joined the National Museum of African Art where she became director of education through 1982. There, she staged public programs including a tribute to Langston Hughes which featured musical group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, jazz and a script by Dr. Eleanor Traylor. Dickerson served as assistant director of Philadelphia's Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum in 1983. In 1984, she became the new president of Chicago's venerable DuSable Museum of African American History and Culture. While serving at DuSable, Dickerson served as a consultant with the Schomburg Center for Black Research while earning her M.A. degree in arts administration from the American University in 1988. Joining the staff of the Chicago Historical Society in 1989, Dickerson brought in the "I Dream a World" exhibit and established the Sojourner Truth Mentoring Program for young women. In 1994, she became director of education and public programs for the museum. After a fellowship with Newberry Library and a stint as "distinguished visitor" at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Dickerson served as coordinator of the Arts in Education program of the Kraft Foods Company in 1997. There, she was promoted to director of corporate giving, and in 2003 she became senior director of Global Community Involvement. Now, on the other side of the philanthropy table, Dickerson funded valuable initiatives in health, hunger, education and the arts.

Retiring in 2009, Dickerson continues to serve the community through her activities on the boards of the Harris Center for Music and Dance at Millennium Park, co-chair of the Peer Network for International Giving of the

Donor's Forum and vice chair of the International Committee of the Council of Foundations. Dickerson was honored as Chicago Professional Grantor of the Year in 2002, Chicagoan of the Year in 2004 and she received the Legacy Award from the ETA Creative Arts Foundation and the Annual Sor Juana Award from the Mexican Fine Arts Center. The Jazz Institute honored her with the Tim Black Award for Community Service in 2006. Dickerson has presented on various arts and community issues and serves as a consultant to various arts, cultural and philanthropic organizations including the National Endowment for the Arts.

Dickerson lives in Chicago with her husband Julian Roberts.

Dickerson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 17, 2009.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Amina J. Dickerson was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 17, 2009, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Art consultant Amina J. Dickerson (1954 - ) was the director of global community involvement for the Kraft Foods Company until 2009. Dickerson also served in executive capacities with Chicago's DuSable Museum of African American History and the Chicago Historical Society.

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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:

Dickerson, Amina J., 1954-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Dickerson, Amina J., 1954- --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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## Occupations:

Museum Director

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Amina J. Dickerson, December 17, 2009. 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 Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:16 ?

Amina J. Dickerson was born on February 21, 1954 in Washington, D.C. to Ann Stewart Dickerson and Julius Dickerson. Her maternal grandmother, Bertha Stewart, was born in Virginia, and had white ancestors. She married candymaker John Stewart, with whom she raised eight children, including Dickerson's mother, in Washington, D.C. Dickerson's paternal grandfather, John Dickerson, moved to Washington, D.C. from Connecticut. He owned a carpentry business, and married Mary Dickerson after the death of Dickerson's paternal grandmother. Dickerson's father served as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, and went on to study architecture at Howard University, where he met Dickerson's mother. After marrying, they raised six children in the Brookland section of Washington, D.C., where they were among the first black households. Her father worked as an architect for the General Services Administration, and also designed museum exhibits for the Smithsonian Institution.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_002, TRT: 0:27:30 ?

Amina J. Dickerson grew up in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington, D.C. She began her education at John Burroughs Elementary School, and then transferred to the St. Anthony Catholic School, where she remained until the eighth grade. At that time, Dickerson enrolled at the all-girls Academy of Notre Dame. With her parents' encouragement, she also took part in the integrated Workshops for Careers in the Arts, which were led by community educator Peggy Cooper Cafritz. Dickerson studied music, theater and dance under such notables as choreographer Louis Johnson and director Mike Malone, and performed in musicals like 'The Summoning of Everyman.' During her final year of high school, she wrote and produced 'The Journey: A Black Ritual Experience,' a musical about the mythical journey of thirteen African Americans which was performed at the Dorothy Betts Marvin Theater. Upon graduating in 1972, Dickerson matriculated at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_003, TRT: 0:24:00 ?

Amina J. Dickerson matriculated at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts. During her freshman year, she restaged her play, 'The Journey: A Black Ritual Experience' at an addiction center in New York City. There, Dickerson met Joan Sandler, the director of the Black Theater Alliance. After the show closed, Dickerson helped found Black Infinity, a nonprofit organization that worked to create social change through theatrical performances. During this time, she faced discrimination from the residents of the majority-white Back Bay neighborhood, which surrounded Emerson College. After one year at the school, she returned to Washington, D.C., where she was invited by director Robert Alexander to audition for the Living Stage Theatre Company, an improvisational troupe that performed at the Arena Stage. She was hired as the company's community relations director, and also performed in minor acting roles. Additionally, Dickerson talks about spirituality and ritual in the black theater.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Amina J. Dickerson worked in community relations at the Living Stage Theatre Company in Washington, D.C., where she was influenced by director Robert Alexander and artistic director Zelda Fichandler. Then, Dickerson was accepted to the Institute in Arts Administration at Harvard University, where she was one of seven African American students. She met black art collector Warren M. Robbins, who recruited her as the assistant director of the Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. There, Dickerson hosted a commemorative program for poet Langston Hughes, and implemented an African cultural program in the District of Columbia Public Schools. She eventually oversaw all of the museum's educational programming. Dickerson also worked as a consultant for Philadelphia's Afro American Historical and Cultural Museum, and later joined the staff as the museum's assistant director. She went on to seek a position at the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Amina J. Dickerson was hired by the board of the DuSable Museum of African American History and its founder, Margaret Burroughs, to serve as the museum's president. During her tenure, Dickerson partnered with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture to showcase a series of historical exhibits, and initiated the annual DuSable Museum Carnival Ball fundraiser. She remained at the museum for four years; and then, in 1989, became the director of the Chicago Historical Society. There, Dickerson hosted several exhibitions of Jacob Lawrence's paintings, including 'I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America' and 'Migration Series,' which memorialized the experiences of African Americans during the Great Migration. Dickerson also supervised the Sojourner Program, which connected girls in the community to mentors like lawyer Michelle Obama, media mogul Oprah Winfrey and author Gwendolyn Brooks. Dickerson also talks about the challenges faced by African American museums.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Amina J. Dickerson received a distinguished visitor's grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, through which she conducted research on the history of African American museums. During that time, Dickerson also retained a fellowship at the Newberry Library. She was later recommended by curator Ronne Hartfield for an arts and education consulting position at the Kraft Foods Group, Inc., and became the company's director of philanthropy. During her tenure at the Kraft Foods Group, Inc., Dickerson oversaw funding for programs in arts education, domestic violence prevention and food insecurity awareness. Through an initiative with America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network, she worked to educate people about the importance of eliminating food waste and providing healthy food to impoverished communities. Dickerson retired from the Kraft Foods Group, Inc. in 2009. She reflects upon her life and family, and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Amina J. Dickerson, Section A2009\_148\_001\_007, TRT: 0:05:16 ?

Amina J. Dickerson reflects upon her family, legacy and how she would like to be remembered. She also shares the motto of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.