

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Christine King Farris

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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>	Farris, Christine King, 1927-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 11, 2010 and November 19, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010 and 2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:59:36).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris (1927 - ) was the eldest sibling of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. She was the longest serving faculty member of Spelman College, and served as vice chair and treasurer of the King Center. Farris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 11, 2010 and November 19, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_074
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 11, 1927, to Alberta Christine Williams King and Martin Luther King, Sr. She was the eldest of three children: her younger siblings were Martin Luther King, Jr., and Alfred Daniel (A.D.) Williams King. Farris and her family belonged to Ebenezer Baptist Church, where her father preached. Farris attended Yonge Street Elementary School, famous for its organization of the first black Parent-Teacher Association, before transferring to Oglethorpe Elementary.

From 1940 to 1942, she attended Atlanta University's Laboratory High School, and when it closed, she enrolled at Booker T. Washington High School, which her grandfather helped to found. In 1944, Farris graduated from Washington High School and entered Spelman College, where her grandmother, mother and great-aunt had all matriculated.

In 1948, Farris graduated from Spelman College with her B.A. degree in economics. One year later, she graduated from Columbia University with her M.A. degree in the social foundations of education. Over the next few summers, she earned a second M.A. degree from Columbia University in special education. In 1950, Farris took her first job as a teacher at W.H. Crogman Elementary, where she taught a seventh grade reading class. In 1958, Farris was hired as director of the freshman reading program at Spelman College, and eventually became director of the Learning Resources Center, a position she still holds. She is Spelman's longest-serving faculty member. In 1965, when her brother, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., led the campaign to vote in Selma, Alabama, Farris sang at the opening rally on the day they departed for Montgomery. After his death, his wife, Coretta Scott King, founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia. Farris served as the treasurer and taught workshops on nonviolence. Farris also went on to found the Martin Luther King, Jr. Child Development Center.

The recipient of the Fannie Lou Hamer Award, Farris helped establish the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Site in 1980, at the suggestion of President Jimmy Carter. She is the author of the acclaimed children's book, *My Brother Martin*, and of an autobiography, *Through It All: Reflections on My Life, My Family, and My Faith*. Currently, Farris resides in Atlanta with her husband, Isaac Newton Farris. They have two children, Isaac Newton Farris, Jr., and Angela Christine Farris, and one granddaughter, Farris Christine Watkins.

Christine King Farris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 11, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Christine King Farris was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 11, 2010 and November 19, 2017, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris (1927 - ) was the eldest sibling of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. She was the longest serving faculty member of Spelman College, and served as vice chair and

## **Restrictions**

### **Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### **Restrictions on Use**

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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:**

Farris, Christine King, 1927-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Farris, Christine King, 1927---Interviews

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African American civil rights activists--Interviews.

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African American professors--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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Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, NAACP,  
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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Spelman College

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## **Occupations:**

Civil Rights Activist

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Education Professor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|EducationMakers

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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 Christine King Farris, July 11, 2010 and November 19, 2017. 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 Christine King Farris, Section A2010\_074\_001\_001, TRT: 0:36:53 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris was born on September 11, 1927 in Atlanta, Georgia to Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Christine Williams King. She describes her earliest childhood memories of the family home at 501 Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia with her parents, her maternal grandparents, Rev. Dr. Adam Daniel Williams and Jenny Celeste Williams, and her great aunt Ida. She then

discusses her relationship with her great aunt and brothers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Alfred King. She talks about the sights, sounds and smells of her upbringing and her earliest memories of Ebenezer Baptist Church. She also describes family dinner conversations, which included discussions of voting rights, community activities, segregation and political figures.

African American families--Georgia--Atlanta.

Childhood and youth--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American grandparents--Georgia--Atlanta.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Ebenezer Baptist Church (Atlanta, Ga.).

Aunts--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American ministers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Williams, A. D. (Adam Daniel), 1863-1931.

King, Martin Luther, 1899-1984.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_001\_002, TRT: 0:23:19 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris describes the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, as well as major issues that affected the African American community, which included desegregation and voting rights. Farris' father, Martin Luther King, Sr., was an outspoken man who was very active in the community. Martin Luther King, Sr. worked with voters' registration and obtaining equal pay for black educators in Atlanta. Farris describes her first experience with tragedy, the death of her maternal grandmother, who died of a stroke while visiting another church. Farris describes the family's sorrow, in particular, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s guilt, caused by his decision not to attend church that day. Farris talks about her parents' colleges, Morehouse College and Spelman College, and the assumption that the children in the family would attend these schools as well.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-)--Georgia.

African Americans--Civil rights--Georgia.

King, Martin Luther, 1899-1984.

Community Development--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American grandmothers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Grief.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Spelman College.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:41 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris describes her parents' home on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia, and her father's purchase of a home at 193 Boulevard after her grandmother's death. The neighborhood where her family lived was an African American community with its own banks, shops and restaurants. Farris describes her father's sermons and her brother's decision to pursue ministry during his freshman year at Morehouse College. Farris and Martin Luther King, Jr. attended Atlanta University Laboratory School until it closed, after which they attended Booker T. Washington High School. After graduating from Spelman, Farris attended Columbia University for graduate school. She describes her family's relationship with Dr. Benjamin Mays, who encouraged her brother to continue pursuing activism. She then describes the dangers her brother faced while traveling through the South during the Civil Rights Movement.

African American families--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American neighborhoods--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American ministers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Booker T. Washington High School (Atlanta, Ga.).

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Columbia University.

Spelman College.

Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.

Civil rights workers--Southern states.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_001\_004, TRT: 0:10:22 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris describes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s

involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. King studied non-violent activism at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, and became the leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association. Farris talks about Rosa Parks, who also became acquainted with non-violent protest after attending the Highlander Folk School. After returning to Atlanta, Georgia from Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became a co-pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church along with his father, and together they founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Farris explains that the King family played a very supportive role in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s efforts, even as the family's concerns for her brother's safety increased.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil rights demonstrations.

Civil rights movement.

Parks, Rosa, 1913-2005.

African American families--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American ministers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Ebenezer Baptist Church (Atlanta, Ga.).

Highlander Folk School (Monteagle, Tenn.).

Montgomery Improvement Association.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_001\_005, TRT: 0:32:41 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris describes the role of her brother, Alfred Daniel Williams King, in the Civil Rights Movement. During the movement, Alfred King served as a pastor in Ensley, Alabama, and his home was bombed. After the bombing, Farris and her father traveled to Alabama to look for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose location was unknown at the time. Farris describes her brother and father's name change from Michael to Martin after the 1934 Baptist World Alliance conference in Berlin, Germany. She describes Homecoming and Women's Day, two important traditions at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Farris describes and explains baptismal ceremonies and tithing in the church. Farris discusses the murder of her mother, Alberta King,



who was shot by Marcus Chenault during church services at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Ebenezer Baptist Church (Atlanta, Ga.)--Rights and ceremonies.

African American ministers.

African American families.

Brothers and sisters.

African American mothers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Parents--Death.

King, Martin Luther, 1899-1984.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section A2010\_074\_001\_006, TRT: 0:11:08 2010/07/11

Civil rights activist and education professor Christine King Farris describes her family's pets, which included a monkey and a deer. Farris talks about her grandmother's death and the guilt of her brother, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Farris describes the various scarves that women wore when she was a child, and tells the story of her brothers taking her grandmother's fox-head stole, and using it to frighten neighbors. Farris describes the facilities built in honor of her brother, Martin Luther King, Jr., and her work to properly entomb him after his assassination, which required three separate moves due to hateful vandalism and violence against his grave site. Martin's body was permanently placed on the grounds of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Farris discusses her brother's achievements, and believes that he would be humbled by the number of monuments and facilities built in his honor.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Grief.

African American grandmothers--Georgia--Atlanta.

Brothers and sisters.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

Funeral rites and ceremonies.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section

A2010\_074\_002\_007, TRT: 7:28:55 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris worked to create the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia shortly after the assassination of her brother, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April of 1968. Farris and her sister-in-law Coretta Scott King initially reached out to Reverend Walter R. McCall to support the project, subsequently involving civil rights leaders such as Andrew Young in the process. The King Center, conceived as a living memorial to Dr. King, opened in the fall of 1968. Initially located on Sunset Avenue, the center then moved to Dr. King's birthplace at 501 Auburn Avenue, partnering with the U.S. National Park Service in its efforts to memorialize Dr. King. In 1969, Farris' youngest brother A.D. King was found drowned in a pool; in spite of the loss, Farris continued to build the center, while serving as a professor of education at Spelman College in Atlanta. At this point in the interview, Farris talks about her brother's recognition and his life's work.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_002\_008, TRT: 8:30:16 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris was in Atlanta, Georgia when she and her parents, Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King, received news of the murder of her brother, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. She then travelled that night with Dr. King's wife, Coretta Scott King, to Memphis, Tennessee to meet with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and make plans to memorialize him. At this time, Farris and Coretta Scott King were close friends, having first met in New York City while Farris was attending Columbia University. Following Dr. King's death, they worked together to create the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta; it served as a memorial as well as a venue for workshops and teach-ins about nonviolence. During this time, Farris wrote a series of texts for adults and children about her brother's life and philosophy. Farris talks about her unwavering faith through her family's struggles, and recalls parenting with Coretta Scott King.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_002\_009, TRT: 9:29:51 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris decided to become an educator, following the paths of her mother, Alberta Williams King, and maternal grandmother, Jennie Parks Williams. Her daughter, Angela Farris Watkins, also became an educator, and her granddaughter, Farris Christine Watkins, was interested in the field at the time of the interview. Farris met her husband, Isaac Newton Farris Sr., at the wedding reception of his Atlanta Daily World colleague, Louis Reid. She attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. At the time, students could not leave campus without permission, but Farris sometimes slipped out to go to the Yates and Milton Drugstore, and to visit her family. Farris met Florence M. Read, then president of Spelman College, as a result of Read's practice of personally approving the transcript of each senior. During her college years, she sang in the Spelman College glee club, directed by Willis Laurence James. Farris remembers strict discipline and dress codes in her time on Spelman College's campus.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section A2010\_074\_002\_010, TRT: 10:29:53 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1944, the same year that her brother Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began attending Morehouse College in Atlanta. There, she met students from around the country, and studied economics and business administration. Farris completed courses at both Spelman College and Morehouse College, where her classmates included Reverend Walter R. McCall, academic Samuel DuBois Cook, funeral director Juanita Sellers Stone and therapist June Dobbs Butts. Farris subsequently taught at W.H. Crogman Elementary School in Atlanta, where she met civil rights leader Albert Brinson, before returning to Spelman College as a professor in the education department. She married Isaac Newton Farris, Sr. in 1960 at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. At this point in the interview, Farris remembers her mother's support following her brother's assassination, and her relationship with Coretta Scott King, describing her as the sister she had never had.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section A2010\_074\_002\_011, TRT: 11:28:30 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris' father, Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., died of a heart attack in 1984. Farris was helping clean his house at the time, and remembers bringing him to Emory Crawford Long Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, where he passed away. Her sister-in-law, Coretta Scott King, died in 2006; Farris cared for her through her illness, and helped arrange her funeral. Due to the prominence of her brother, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Farris and her family experienced life on a public stage, something to which Farris never became accustomed. At this point in the interview, Farris reflects upon her life. She talks about the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., and describes various collections of her brother's papers at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts; Atlanta University Center Consortium in Atlanta; and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta. She concludes this part of the interview by describing her hopes for the King center.

Video Oral History Interview with Christine King Farris, Section  
A2010\_074\_002\_012, TRT: 12:09:07 2017/11/19

Christine King Farris talks about race in the United States, reflecting upon the segregation that remains despite the presidency of Barack Obama. She reflects upon her legacy, and concludes the interview by talking about her children, Isaac Newton Farris, Jr. and Angela Farris Watkins.