

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dorothy Roberts

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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>	Roberts, Dorothy E., 1956-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 27, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:00:09).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Law professor Dorothy Roberts (1956 - ) was the Kirkland & Ellis Professor at the Northwestern University School of Law and the author of <i>Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty</i> . Roberts was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 27, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_104
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Law Professor Dorothy E. Roberts was born in 1956. In 1977, she graduated from Yale University, *magna cum laude*, where she was also elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Three years later, in 1980, Roberts graduated from Harvard Law School with her J.D., and for the next year she served as a law clerk for Hon. Constance Baker Motley in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. After her admission to the New York State Bar in 1981, Roberts worked as an associate in the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison until 1988.

From 1998 to 1994, Roberts was an Associate Professor of Law at Rutgers University School of Law-Newark, and from 1994 to 1998, she was a Professor of Law. While there, she served as the Faculty Graduation Speaker in both 1992 and 1996; visiting Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1994; fellow at the Harvard University Program in Ethics and the Professions from 1994 to 1995; and as visiting professor at Northwestern University School of Law in 1997. In 1998, she joined the faculty of Northwestern School of Law with a joint appointment as a faculty fellow at the Institute for Policy Research; in 2002, she was named the Kirkland & Ellis Professor at the Northwestern University School of Law. While at Northwestern, Roberts served as visiting professor at Stanford Law School in 1998; as a Fulbright Fellow at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, Trinidad & Tobago from 2002 to 2003; and as the Bacon-Kilkenny Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Fordham University School of Law in 2006. Recipient of the 1998 Radcliffe Graduate Society Medal and the 1999 Freedom of Choice Award from the Chicago Abortion Fund, Roberts published her first book, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, in 1997. The book earned her a 1998 Myers Center Award for the Study of Human Rights in North America. In 2001, she published her second book, *Shattered Bonds: The Color Of Child Welfare*, which received research awards from the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. Recipient of the 2007 Leadership Award from the Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers, in 2009 Roberts earned the Family Defender Award from the Family Defense Center and the YWomen Leadership Award from the YWCA Evanston/North Shore.

Roberts was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 27, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dorothy Roberts was conducted by Thomas Jefferson on August 27, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Law professor Dorothy Roberts (1956 - ) was the Kirkland & Ellis Professor at the Northwestern University School of Law and the author of *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*.

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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:

Roberts, Dorothy E., 1956-

Jefferson, Thomas (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Roberts, Dorothy E., 1956- --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:

Law Professor

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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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 Dorothy Roberts, August 27, 2010. 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 Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_001, TRT: 0:34:44 ?  
Dorothy Roberts was born on March 8, 1956 in Chicago, Illinois to Iris White Roberts and Robert Roberts. Her paternal great-grandparents were German immigrants to Chicago, where they raised her paternal grandmother, Johanna Reinert Roberts, who married photoengraver and Welsh immigrant Alfred

Roberts. Roberts' father grew up in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood, and obtained a Ph.D. degree from University of Chicago. He taught anthropology at Roosevelt University in Chicago, where he met and married her mother. Roberts' mother was born to carpenter Alexander White and seamstress Rebecca Smith White in Kingston, Jamaica, and worked as a teacher in Liberia before receiving a scholarship to Chicago's Roosevelt University. When Roberts was an infant, her parents moved to Liberia to teach; and, after two years, returned to Chicago, where they raised three daughters in the integrated Hyde Park community. Roberts also describes her father's ethnographic research on interracial marriage in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Dorothy Roberts began her education at the integrated Beulah Shoemith Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois, where her classmates included jazz musician Oscar Brown III. She founded the school's newspaper, and was mentored by her seventh grade teacher, Mrs. McCoo, who was African American. Roberts was politically active from an early age, and attended meetings about the Civil Rights Movement and gang activity at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. In 1969, Roberts graduated as valedictorian of her eighth grade class. Her family then moved to Egypt, where she attended the Cairo American College. In 1971, they returned to Illinois, where Roberts enrolled at Evanston Township High School. She was elected to the student council, and completed advanced placement coursework. After graduating, Roberts matriculated at Yale University, where she majored in anthropology with a focus on social justice. She joined the Black Student Alliance at Yale, where she met black studies scholar Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Dorothy Roberts graduated from Yale University in 1977, and enrolled at the Harvard Law School, where her classmates included future Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner and law professor Anthony R. Chase. She joined the Black Law Students Association, and served as the chapter's secretary during her third year. She also interned at Greater Boston Legal Services, where she represented low income clients. Roberts earned her J.D. degree in 1980, and became a law clerk for Judge Constance Baker Motley of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. In 1981, Roberts drafted an opinion for the case of *Moe v. Dinkins*, which was a class action lawsuit regarding a teenager's right to marry without parental consent. Through this experience, Roberts became interested in reproductive rights. After one year, she joined the majority white firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison LLP, where she represented the Museum of the American Indian during its merger with the Smithsonian Institution.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:52 ?

Dorothy Roberts worked at the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, LLP during the 1980s. While there, she was influenced by the 1987 case of *In re A.C.*, which appealed a court order to perform a Cesarean section on a pregnant cancer patient without her consent. In 1988, Roberts became a professor at the Rutgers Law School. She published an article on black women's reproductive rights in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1991, under the editorial leadership of future President Barack Obama. In 1995, Roberts received a fellowship to the Harvard Program in Ethics and the Professions; and, in 1997, she completed her first book, *'Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty.'* In 1998, Roberts joined the faculty of the Northwestern University School of Law. She published *'Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child*

Welfare’ in 2002; and, at the time of the interview, was writing ‘Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Recreate Race in the Twenty-first Century.’

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_005, TRT: 0:34:14 ?

Dorothy Roberts was named the Kirkland and Ellis professor at the Northwestern University School of Law in 2002. Later that year, she received a Fulbright Fellowship to the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. There, she co-taught a course on men and masculinities with sociologist Rhoda Reddock. Together, they also researched the impact of gender and sexuality on patients with HIV/AIDS; and, based on their project, published ‘Sex, Power and Taboo: Gender and HIV in the Caribbean and Beyond.’ In 2003, Roberts served as the Bacon Kilkenny Distinguished Visiting Professor of Law at the Fordham University School of Law, where she led a symposium on The Racial Geography of Child Welfare. She was also featured in the 2007 documentary film ‘Silent Choices,’ which addressed the attitudes about abortion within the black community. Roberts talks about inequality and the definition of race, and shares a message to future generations. She also reflects upon her life and career.

Video Oral History Interview with Dorothy Roberts, Section A2010\_104\_001\_006, TRT: 0:20:53 ?

Dorothy Roberts reflects upon her family, legacy and faith. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and shares a message for family. Roberts concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.