



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

---

## 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>	Robert Bullard
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 12, 2011
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2011
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:20:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Environmental activist and sociologist Robert Bullard (1946 - ) became director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark-Atlanta University in 1994. He is often considered the “Father of Environmental Justice.” Bullard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 12, 2011, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2011_020
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Environmental activist and sociologist Robert Bullard was born on December 21, 1946, in Elba, Alabama, to Myrtle and Nehemiah Bullard. He was the fourth of five children. Growing up in Alabama during the 1950s, Bullard experienced the effects of a segregated community. After graduating from high school, Bullard went on to attend the Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University. He received his B.A. degree in history and government with a minor in sociology in 1968. He continued his education at Atlanta University, where he earned his M.S. degree in sociology in 1972. During his graduate studies, Bullard started his work in urban planning and went on to complete his Ph.D. program at Iowa State University in 1976.

After receiving his Ph.D. degree, Bullard moved to Texas to teach at Texas Southern University. It was in Texas that Bullard met his future wife, Linda McKeever. In 1978, Bullard was asked by Linda to collect data for a lawsuit, *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Corporation*; she had filed in federal court involving the placement of garbage facilities in mostly black Houston neighborhoods. This was the first lawsuit that charged environmental discrimination using federal civil rights laws. This inspired Bullard to learn more about careers in the environmental field. After Texas, Bullard taught at universities in Tennessee and California before returning to his alma-mater, Clark Atlanta University, where he was named the Edmund Asa Ware Distinguished Professor of Sociology and the Director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University. In this position, Bullard was able to do research and actively pursue the issue of environmental justice.

Bullard has been a pioneer in the field of environmental justice. Among his many accomplishments, Bullard helped to organize the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, the first meeting of its kind where various minority groups could discuss the problems associated with environmental justice. Just a few years later, he was instrumental in President Clinton’s signing of Executive Order 12898, the first legal document

that defined the need for environmental justice in the United States. For his continued research on contemporary cases of environmental justice and his active presence in the community, Bullard has been called the “Father of Environmental Justice.” Bullard has delivered many presentations and he has written over fifteen books detailing his research and perspectives on environmental policy. A selection of his works include: "Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality," "Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots" and "Race, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina".

Among the many awards that Bullard has received is the American Sociological Association's William Foote Whyte Distinguished Career Award in 2007. He was also named one of Newsweek’s thirteen “Environmental Leaders of the Century,” in 2008.

Robert Bullard was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 12, 2011.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Bullard was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 12, 2011, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Environmental activist and sociologist Robert Bullard (1946 - ) became director of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark-Atlanta University in 1994. He is often considered the “Father of Environmental Justice.”

---

## 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®.

---

## 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.

---

## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Bullard, Robert D. (Robert Doyle), 1946

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Bullard, Robert D. (Robert Doyle), 1946--Interviews

---

African American sociologists--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Clark Atlanta University

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

---

## 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 Bullard, April 12, 2011. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

---

## 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, April 12, 2011

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:45  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard talks about his family background. His mother Myrtle Brundidge Bullard was born around 1910 in Opp, Alabama to Savannah Brundidge. She graduated from high school, but could not go to college due to lack of resources during the depression era. Bullard's paternal great grandparents, Peter and Lucinda Hammons, bought five hundred acres of timberland in 1875, which was passed down to Bullard's grandparents Minnie and Jim Brundidge. Later, Bullard's father inherited the land, which he managed, and he also worked under a white electrician.

African American families--Alabama

Great Depression--African Americans

African Americans--Segregation--Alabama

Reconstruction (U.S. history, 1865-1877)

United States. Dept. of Agriculture--History--19th century

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_002, TRT: 2:32:32  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard continues to discuss his parents and mentions that after they got married, his father worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps. Bullard grew up in Mulberry Heights, a neighborhood in Elba, Alabama. He attended Mulberry Heights Elementary School and a high school of the same name. Bullard's parents insisted upon eating healthy meals together as a family. Bullard enjoyed school and his happy home life, where he was always reading books. Bullard recalls some events of the Civil Rights Movement, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Freedom Rides. His parents were very interested in local and world news and were involved in the community's civil rights activities.

African American families--Alabama--Elba

African American neighborhoods--Alabama--Elba

Civilian Conservation Corps (U.S.)

Segregation in education—Alabama

Montgomery Bus Boycott, Montgomery, Ala., 1955-1956

Freedom Rides, 1961

African American children--Education--Alabama--Elba.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:16  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard describes his high school experience. His segregated high school was unique because the teachers were very motivated to educate the students about things like civil rights, which was not in the approved curriculum. Bullard graduated from high school in 1964 as salutatorian of his class. He chose to attend Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University in Huntsville, where he majored in history and government with a minor in sociology. Bullard finishes by talking about the influence of civil rights. Because Huntsville was isolated from the bigger cities like Birmingham and Montgomery, there was not much civil rights activity at the school.

Segregation in education--Alabama

Alabama A & M University

Segregation in higher education--Alabama

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:32  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard talks about the student march that occurred at Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University after the death of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. After graduating from college, Bullard was quickly drafted into the U.S. Marine Corps, where he served in North Carolina for two years at an air control station. He then went to Atlanta University in 1970 to earn his master's degree in sociology. Atlanta was a hub for black sociologists studying racial oppression, and W.E.B. DuBois was the founder of the sociology department at Atlanta University. After earning his master's degree, Bullard went to Iowa where his sister lived with her husband. He worked for the City of Des Moines, doing community development and urban planning before enrolling at Iowa State University in Des Moines to pursue his Ph.D. degree.

United States.--Marine Corps--African American troops

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Huntsville--History--20th century

College students--Political activity--United States--History--20th century

Du Bois, W. E. B.--(William Edward Burghardt)--1868-1963

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

Atlanta University

Iowa State University

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:15  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard talks about his Ph.D. dissertation and the work that he did in the City of Des Moines. His research studied the effects of change with a combination of programs that addressed key issues of a good neighborhood. In 1976, Bullard earned his Ph.D. from Iowa State University and went to teach at Texas Southern University in Houston. He talks about his book, "Invisible Houston," which examines issues of racial discrimination in the largest black population in the South, including environmental racism with items such as landfills in black communities. Because Houston did not have zoning regulations, eighty-two percent of landfills were placed in black communities, even though blacks only represent twenty-five percent of the population.

Des Moines (Iowa)--Social conditions

Texas Southern University

African Americans--Texas--Houston--Economic conditions

African Americans--Texas--Houston--Social conditions

Houston (Tex.)--Economic conditions

Houston (Tex.)--Social conditions

Environmental justice--United States

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:13  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard discusses his teaching positions within the University of California system and the publication of his book, "Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality," in 1990. This book was the first book on environmental justice. In recognition of his work, Bullard was invited to work

at the National Wildlife Federation in Washington, D.C., for one year. He also organized the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, which was held in 1991. In light of the treatment of waste from the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010, Bullard notes that the environmental justice efforts are not complete. Also in the early 1990s, Bullard met with William Reilly, administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, to put environmental justice on the national agenda. President Bill Clinton signed an executive order in 1994, defining environmental justice. That same year, Bullard established the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University.

Environmental policy--Southern States

Waste disposal sites--Location--Southern States

Race discrimination--Texas--Houston

Environmental justice--United States

BP Deepwater Horizon Explosion and Oil Spill, 2010.

Clinton, Bill, 1946-

Executive orders--United States.

Clark Atlanta University.--Environmental Justice Resource Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Bullard, Section A2011\_020\_001\_007, TRT: 7:19:01  
2011/04/12

Robert Bullard discusses the interplay between the environment and justice. In 2001, EPA director Christine Todd Whitman attempted to remove race from the executive order. Under President George W. Bush, the issue of race in the environment was dismissed, but President Barack Obama appointed the first African American administrator of the EPA, Lisa P. Jackson, who developed an inter-agency approach to environmentalism. Bullard reflects on his life's accomplishments and says that he would have liked to create more resources for graduate students and communities. He considers his legacy to be the idea that one can be a scholar, an activist and a teacher simultaneously. Bullard would like to be remembered for his work in the area of environmental justice and his publications. He also mentions his three children and their accomplishments.

Environmental justice

Environmental protection

United States.--Environmental Protection Agency.