

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Fillmore Freeman

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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>	Freeman, Fillmore, 1936-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 27, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:16:57).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Organic chemist and chemistry professor Fillmore Freeman (1936 - ) joined the faculty of California State University in 1973. He has conducted significant research in the field of physical organic chemistry, particularly in the synthesis and structural understanding of potential anti-tumor and anti-viral compounds. Freeman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 27, 2012, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_203
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Organic chemist and chemistry professor Fillmore Freeman was born in 1936 in Lexington, Mississippi. Freeman earned his high school diploma from John Marshall High School in Chicago, Illinois in 1953. In 1957, he graduated summa cum laude from Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio, with his B.S. degree, and then went on to pursue his graduate studies at Michigan State University, where he received his Ph.D. degree in physical organic chemistry in 1962.

After a brief stint working with a private firm, Freeman served as a National Institutes of Health Fellow at Yale University in 1964. The following year, he became an assistant professor of at California State University at Long Beach. During this time, the school expanded its chemistry and biochemistry programs to accommodate the growing interest in these fields. In 1973, Freeman became a professor of chemistry at the University of California at Irvine, where he continued to work for the duration of his professional career. With his background in physical organic chemistry, Freeman has conducted research on a number of topics, including organic synthesis pathways and reactions, particularly those of cyclic compounds. His research has also relied heavily on the use of computational chemistry. In 1991, Freeman was the recipient of a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study the biochemical properties of allicin, a component of garlic chemistry. Freeman's work has had a strong emphasis in isolating, researching and synthesizing compounds with anti-tumor and anti-viral properties.

Freeman has received much recognition for his work in the field of physical organic chemistry. He was named an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellow and a Fulbright-Hayes Senior Research Fellow. He also had the opportunity to serve as a visiting professor at the Max Planck Institute of Biophysical Chemistry and the University of Paris. Author of numerous academic papers, Freeman was identified as the third most highly cited African American chemist in a 2002 report by Oklahoma State University.

Fillmore Freeman was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 29, 2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Fillmore Freeman was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 27, 2012, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Organic chemist and chemistry professor Fillmore Freeman (1936 - ) joined the faculty of California State University in 1973. He has conducted significant research in the field of physical organic chemistry, particularly in the synthesis and structural understanding of potential anti-tumor and anti-viral compounds.

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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:**

Freeman, Fillmore, 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Freeman, Fillmore, 1936---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:**

Organic Chemist

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Chemistry Professor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers|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 Fillmore Freeman, November 27, 2012. 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 Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:17 2012/11/27

Fillmore Freeman describes his family background. Freeman's mother, Ellen Meeks, was born in Holmes County, Mississippi. She died of tuberculosis when Freeman was five years old, leaving behind five children. He recalls his family moving from Mississippi to Chicago when he was very young, and then moving back to Mississippi when his mother was sick. Freeman's father, Millard Fillmore Freeman, was also born in Holmes County. He describes his father's life in Mississippi and his training to become a Baptist minister. After the death of his mother, his father remarried, and raised three of his five children. Freeman's oldest and youngest brothers were raised by other relatives. Freeman talks about his maternal and paternal families owning land in Mississippi and working as farmers. He also shares his family's stories about segregation and slavery in Mississippi.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:43 2012/11/27

In this section of the interview, Freeman discusses the dynamics of skin color in the African American community, in the mid-twentieth century as well as in

current times. He describes the death of his mother when he was five years old and the move of his family back from Mississippi to Chicago, Illinois, where they initially lived on 31st Street, in the South Side. His family then moved to the Robert Brooks government housing project, which is where he lived until he left home for college. Freeman describes the Chicago public school system, the housing situation for the poor black community, and gang activity in the 1940s. He also describes his childhood memories of rural Mississippi and of living in the projects in Chicago. Freeman attended St. Joseph's Catholic School. He talks about his experience in school, and his love for learning and reading.

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Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:46 2012/11/27

Fillmore Freeman was raised on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois, where he and his family lived in the Robert Brooks government housing projects, until he left for college in 1953. Freeman attended St. Joseph's Catholic School until the eighth grade, and then attended Crane Technical High School, before moving to Marshall High School. He describes his studies in high school, and his involvement on the basketball team. Freeman's father, Millard Fillmore Freeman, worked as a laborer and also as a Baptist minister in Chicago. He shares his experience in church and his perspective on religion. He also talks about his father's and stepmother's employment in Chicago, which ultimately enabled them to afford to leave the projects. Freeman describes the thriving business scene on Maxwell Street, his jobs as a young boy, and the pressures of being poor and growing up in the projects.

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Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_004, TRT: 4:32:53 2012/11/27

In 1953, Fillmore Freeman graduated from John Marshall Metropolitan High School in Chicago, Illinois. He describes his studies and his extracurricular activities there. Freeman attended Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio, where he played on the collegiate basketball team, joined the Army ROTC Program, and majored in chemistry. He describes his experience in college, and his relationship with his chemistry professors. Freeman also talks about the president of Central State University, Charles Wesley, HistoryMaker, Alice Windom, and segregation in Wilberforce and Xenia, Ohio in the 1950s. From 1957 to 1962, Freeman worked towards his Ph.D. degree in physical organic chemistry at Michigan State University, where he studied tetracyanocyclopropanes chemistry under the tutelage of Dr. Harold Hart. In this section of the interview, Freeman also discusses the interest in cyclopropane chemistry in the 1950s, getting married in 1959, and being involved in a serious laboratory accident the same year.

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Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:17 2012/11/27

Fillmore Freeman married in 1959, and a few weeks later, was involved in a laboratory accident that resulted in second and third degree burns. He describes his long recovery. From 1962 to 1964, Freeman worked as a researcher at Standard Oil of California. In 1964, he received a NIH postdoctoral fellowship to attend Yale University, where he worked in the area of oxidation chemistry. In 1965, he became an assistant professor of chemistry at California State University, Long Beach,

where he collaborated on research on chemical compounds to combat Chagas disease. In 1972, he spent a year in sabbatical at the University of Paris, and then accepted a tenured position at the University of California, Irvine. Freeman also discusses his early research in synthetic organic chemistry, screening chemical compounds against HIV, his work on carbenes, the lack of African Americans at UC Irvine, the California university system, and his sabbatical in Chicago.

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Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section A2012\_203\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:52 2012/11/27

In 1979, Fillmore Freeman served as an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he focused on oxidation chemistry. In 1977 and 1978, Freeman received an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Fellowship and a Fulbright-Hayes scholarship, and went to the Max Planck Institute of Biophysical Chemistry, where he worked on fast kinetic reactions with Nobel laureate, Manfred Eigen. In 1982, he worked at the Institut de Chimie des Substances Naturelles in France with Nobel laureate, Sir Derek Barton, on the synthesis of heterocyclic compounds and oxidation of chromium compounds. Freeman is well-known as an expert in organosulfur chemistry, and describes his early collaboration with Professor Eloy Rodriguez. He also talks about his service at the National Science Foundation in 1989, his report on the properties of di-tert-butyl chromate, the health benefits of garlic, and the lack of African American faculty in chemistry departments across the United States.

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Video Oral History Interview with Fillmore Freeman, Section  
A2012\_203\_001\_007, TRT: 7:18:09 2012/11/27

Fillmore Freeman reflects upon his life, his career, and his legacy. He also talks about his four children and their families, his hobbies, and his hopes for his future, both in science as well as in his personal life. Freeman describes the field of computational chemistry, and its applications for medicine and the pharmaceutical industry. He also discusses the impact of computers on society, the future of the field of physical organic chemistry, and his work on promoting undergraduate research in chemistry.

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