

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dawn Wright

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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>	Wright, Dawn Jeannine, 1961-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 27, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:42:32).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Oceanographer Dawn Wright (1961 - ) is an expert on the Geographic Information System and has traveled the world mapping the ocean floor. Wright 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_204
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Professor and oceanographer Dawn Jeannine Wright was born on April 15, 1961 to Jeanne and Robert Wright. Wright grew up on the island of Maui, Hawaii, fascinated by stories of adventure and discovery of the open seas. She graduated cum laude with her B.S. degree in geology from Wheaton College in 1983. She then earned her M.S. degree from Texas A&M University in oceanography in 1986. During her graduate studies, Wright served as a graduate research assistant and a marine laboratory specialist with the Ocean Drilling Program at Texas A&M University. Following her work as a marine laboratory specialist, Wright received her Ph.D. degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1994 with

her dissertation entitled “From Pattern to Process on the Deep Ocean Floor: a Geographic Information System Approach.”

The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) hired Wright as a postdoctoral research associate following graduation. She began her teaching career in 1995 as an assistant professor in the Department of Geosciences at Oregon State University. By 2002, she was promoted to full professor. Wright is an expert on geographic information systems, and her work has focused on mapping the ocean floor in locations around the globe including: Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, in American Samoa, the East Pacific Rise in the Pacific Ocean, the Tonga Trench in the South Pacific Ocean, and the Juan de Fuca Ridge in the North Pacific Ocean. Along with her work in mapping the sea floor, Wright has assisted with a number of outreach programs, hoping to encourage more minority and female students to consider a career in the sciences.

Wright has published a large number of papers detailing her investigations. She has received several awards in recognition of her work, both as a teacher and as a leading scientist in her field. She won the United States Professor of the Year for the State of Oregon in 2007, and has been listed as one of fifteen scientists featured in Portraits of Great American Scientists. She was also named a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Wright has co-authored the reference book, *Arc Marine: GIS for a Blue Planet*.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Dawn Wright was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 27, 2012, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Oceanographer Dawn Wright (1961 - ) is an expert on the Geographic Information System and has traveled the world mapping the ocean floor.

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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:**

Wright, Dawn Jeannine, 1961-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Wright, Dawn Jeannine, 1961---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:**

Oceanographer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers

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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 Dawn Wright, 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 Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:24 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright describes her family background. Wright's mother, Jeanne Phyllis Grove, was born in 1935 in Baltimore, Maryland, where her father was a well-known Baptist minister. Grove attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Baltimore, and earned her bachelor's degree in speech at Wheaton College, Illinois. After completing her master's degree in the humanities at South Dakota State University, Grove began teaching college in Charleston, South Carolina, where she met Wright's father, Robert Theodore Wright. Robert Wright was born in Charleston in 1937. He was a star basketball player at South Carolina State University, and spent his career coaching high school basketball. When Wright was four years old, her parents moved to Saskatchewan, Canada and later to Hawaii, where her mother accepted several teaching positions. Wright's parents divorced when she was eleven years old, and she was then raised by her mother. She then goes on to describe her close relationship with her mother.

African American families--Southern States.

African American ministers--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American mothers--Education.

African American college athletes--South Carolina.

Children of divorced parents--Family relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:20 2012/11/27

When Dawn Wright was five years old, her parents moved to Honolulu, Hawaii, where her mother was hired at the speech department at the University of Hawaii. A year later, the family moved to the island of Maui, where her mother was offered the opportunity to establish the speech

communication department at Maui Community College. Wright began her second grade schooling on Maui, and lived there throughout her childhood. She describes her life on the island of Maui, her exposure to Hawaii's cultural and racial diversity, and her experience as the only African American at her school. Wright's early life on the Pacific coast, and her interest in films and television, especially Jacques Cousteau's work on ocean adventures, ultimately led her to consider a career in the oceanic sciences. Wright also talks about her parents' strained marriage, following their move to Hawaii.

African American mothers--Employment--Pacific Coast.  
Speech--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.  
Childhood--Maui (Hawaii).

Cousteau, Jacques, 1910-1997.

Oceanography--Vocational guidance--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:59 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright received most of her schooling on the Hawaiian island of Maui, at Wailuku Elementary School, Iao Intermediate School and Baldwin High School. The U.S. space project and her science classes at school inspired Wright to consider a career in the sciences. Wright and her mother returned to the East coast during her sophomore year in high school, to be closer to her ailing maternal grandmother. She attended Wild Lake High School in Columbia, Maryland, where she received an excellent education in the sciences. Wright describes her experiences in school in Hawaii and Maryland, the teachers who influenced her, as well as her interest in athletics in high school. She also describes the differences between her upbringing on Maui and her experience as an African American living on the East coast in the 1970s.

Schools--Maui (Hawaii).

Science--Vocational guidance--United States.

African American high school students--Maryland.

Culture shock--United States.

Mentoring in education--Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section

A2012\_204\_001\_004, TRT: 4:24:03 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright attended Wild Lake High School in Columbia, Maryland, where she excelled academically, and also participated in basketball, track and cross-country running. After graduating from high school in 1979, Wright followed in her mother's footsteps and attended Wheaton College near Chicago, Illinois. In preparation for her desire to become an oceanographer, Wright majored in geology. She was also a member of the collegiate basketball team, which competed at the NCAA Division 3 level. Wright fondly recalls her educational and social experience at Wheaton College.

High school athletes--Maryland.

Wheaton College (Ill.).

African American college athletes--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_005, TRT: 5:32:01 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright earned her bachelor's degree in geology at Wheaton College, Illinois, where she also participated in collegiate sports and was involved in a minority outreach organization called Building Relationships in Discipleship, Grace and Experience (BRIDGE). Upon earning her B.S. degree in 1983, Wright enrolled in a master's degree program in oceanography at Texas A&M University, where she completed her dissertation research on the nature of the northern terminus of the Tonga trench in Southwest Pacific. Wright describes her maiden trip aboard a research vessel on the Gulf of Mexico, and the principles underlying bathymetric measurements. After receiving her master's degree in 1986, Wright stayed on as a marine technician on the ocean drilling program at Texas A&M. She was involved in ten oceanic expeditions during her time on the project, and visited several international locations, including Senegal, Barbados, Kenya, Mauritius and Antarctica.

Geology--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

Minorities--Services for--United States.

Oceanography--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

Texas A & M University. Department of Oceanography.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:20 2012/11/27

In 1990, Dawn Wright began her Ph.D. degree in oceanography at the Marine Science Institute and the National Center for Geographic Information and Analysis (NCGIA) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Mentored by Raymond C. Smith and Michael Goodchild, Wright focused on mapping the ocean floor using the newly-developed geographic information systems (GIS) technique. After completing her doctoral degree in 1995, Wright accepted a post-doctoral research position at the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Newport, Oregon. Eight months later, she joined the faculty of the Department of Geosciences at Oregon State University, where she served as a professor of geography and oceanography in 2012. Wright describes her experience at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her dive aboard the Deep-Submergence Vehicle, Alvin, in 1991, made her part of the first all-female crew and the first African American woman on a submersible dive to the ocean floor.

Doctoral students--Oceanography--United States.

National Center for Geographic Information & Analysis (U.S.)

Mentoring in science--California.

Oregon State University. Department of Geosciences--Faculty.

Minorities in science--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:10 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright describes the significance of ocean mapping to understanding climate change, storms, and other forces of nature. In 2000, Wright served as co-editor of her first book, 'Marine and Coastal Geographical Information Systems', focusing on deep-sea geology and GIS systems. In 2001, Wright served as a technical lead at the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) on the development of the ArcGIS model, a software program

that accumulates data and applies geographic analysis to implement solutions to geographical problems. Wright received the Black Affairs Education Award by the Oregon Assembly, and was named U.S. Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 2006 and 2007, respectively. She talks about her future professional activities, reflects upon her life and career, and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Ocean bottom.

Geological mapping.

Oceanographers--United States--Intellectual life--20th century.

Environmental Systems Research Institute (Redlands, Calif.).

Education--Awards--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_001\_008, TRT: 8:15:15 2012/11/27

Dawn Wright believes that her legacy lies in having explored new frontiers of science and education, as an African American and as a female oceanographer. Wright reflects upon her life and her family, and talks about how she would like to be remembered. She also describes her photographs.

Minorities--Oceanography--United States.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_WRIGHT\_DAWN\_06\_MED\_001, TRT:

This tape contains a DVD of a program produced by PBS called "Life By The Numbers: Shape Of The World."

Video Oral History Interview with Dawn Wright, Section  
A2012\_204\_WRIGHT\_DAWN\_06\_MED\_002, TRT:

This tape contains a DVD of a program entitled "Exploring Frontiers In Science: Live From Oregon."