

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Berry Gordy

---

## 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>	Gordy, Berry
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Berry Gordy,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 12, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	uncompressed MOV digital video files ().
<b>Abstract:</b>	Songwriter and music executive Berry Gordy (1929- ) founded Motown Record Corporation in 1960 where he worked with artists including Smokey Robinson, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. Gordy was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 12, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_257
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Songwriter and music executive Berry Gordy was born in Detroit, Michigan on November 28, 1929 to Berta and Berry Gordy, Sr. He attended Northeastern High School, but dropped out his junior year to pursue a featherweight boxing career, where he fought just fifteen matches, winning twelve. He later earned his GED while serving in the U.S. Army.

Gordy served in the U.S. Army's 58th Field Artillery Battalion, 3rd Infantry Division from 1951 until 1953, also serving as a chaplain's assistant, playing the organ at religious services. After discharge from military service, he began writing songs and opened 3-D Record Mart, which mostly sold jazz music. The business lasted just two years, and Gordy subsequently worked at Ford Motor's Lincoln Mercury plant. He continued to write music regularly, penning hit songs for Jackie Wilson and Etta James in 1957. This led him to resign from the Lincoln Mercury plant and pursue a professional songwriting career. Gordy began producing music for the group the Miracles, featuring Smokey Robinson, which led to the formation of Gordy's own record label, Tamla Records. In 1960, Motown Record Corporation was founded, under which many popular artists were signed, including Mary Wells, the Supremes, the Marvelettes, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Martha and the Vandellas, Tami Terrell, the Temptations, the Four Tops and the Jackson Five. Gordy moved Motown from Detroit to Los Angeles, California in 1972. Expanding his enterprise to films, Gordy released *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), *Mahogany* (1975) and *The Wiz* (1978), all featuring Diana Ross. Additionally, Motown began to spawn the solo careers of many of other artists on their label, such as Smokey Robinson, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. Gordy sold Motown in 1988 and Motown Productions the following year.

Throughout his career, Gordy has received numerous awards, including the Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award in 1969, induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1988, the Grammy Trustee Award in 1991, a star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1996, and the American Legend Award in 1998. In 1994, Warner Books released Gordy's autobiography, *To Be Loved*. In 2016, Gordy was awarded the National Medal of Arts by

President Barack Obama; and, in 2019, the Los Angeles City Council designated the former location of Motown Records, at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Argyle Avenue in Hollywood, Berry Gordy Square.

Gordy resides in Palm Desert, California.

Berry Gordy was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 17, 2012.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Berry Gordy was conducted by Gwen Ifill on November 12, 2012, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on uncompressed MOV digital video files. Songwriter and music executive Berry Gordy (1929- ) founded Motown Record Corporation in 1960 where he worked with artists including Smokey Robinson, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie.

---

## 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:

Gordy, Berry

Ifill, Gwen (Interviewer)

N/A (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gordy, Berry--Interviews

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Business Chief Executive

---

Music Executive

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|MusicMakers

---

## 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 Berry Gordy, November 12, 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 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).

---

## 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**