

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wesley Harris

PERSON

Harris, Wesley, 1941-

Alternative Names: Wesley Harris;

Life Dates: October 29, 1941-

Place of Birth: Richmond, Virginia, USA

Residence: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Work: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Occupations: Aerospace Engineer;

Biographical Note

Aerospace engineer Wesley L. Harris was born in Richmond, Virginia on October 29, 1941. His parents, William Harris and Rosa Harris, worked in Richmond's tobacco factories. As a child, Harris was intrigued by airplanes and learned to build different models. In the fourth grade, he won an essay contest about career goals with a paper on how he wanted to become a test pilot. After receiving his B.S. degree with honors in aerospace engineering from the University of Virginia in 1964, Harris enrolled at Princeton University and graduated from there with his M.S. degree in aerospace and mechanical sciences in 1966 and his Ph.D. degree in aerospace and mechanical sciences 1968.

After completing his Ph.D. at Princeton, Harris taught at the University of Virginia and at Southern University before joining the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1972 where he served as a professor of aeronautics and astronautics. He established MIT's first Office of Minority Education in 1975 in order to help retain minority students and improve their performance. In 1985, Harris was appointed Dean of the School of Engineering at the University of Connecticut; and from 1990 to 1995, he served as vice president and chief administrative officer at the University of Tennessee Space Institute and then as associate administrator for aeronautics NASA. In 2003, Harris was named head of the department of Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT in 2003.

Harris' many honors and achievements include serving as chair and member of various boards and committees of the National Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Army Science Board, and several state governments. He is a

Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and the American Helicopter Society. The National Academy of Engineering elected Harris as a Fellow for contributions to understanding of helicopter rotor noise, for encouragement of minorities in engineering, and for service to the aeronautical industry.

Wesley L. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 26, 2013.

Related Entries

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.A.

University of Virginia [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.S.

University of Virginia [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1968 to 1970]

Assistant Professor

Southern University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1991 to ?]

Associate Professor of Physics

University of Virginia [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to ?]

Associate Professor

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1972 to 1973]

Visiting Associate Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1992 to ?]

Associate Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1993 to ?]

Associate Professor of Ocean Engineering

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to 1980]

Program Manager

Harris Analytics and Planning, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1995 to 1999]

President and Owner

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1994 to ?]

Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

University of Connecticut [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1995 to 1997]

Dean of the School of Engineering

UTSI [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 197108 to ?]

Vice President and Chief Administration Officer

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1966 to ?]

Associate Administrator for Aeronautics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Rotor Acoustics Group [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Founder and Director

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Office of Minority Education [MEMBEROF]
[from 1975 to 1978]

Director

U.S. Army Science Board [MEMBEROF]
[from 1979 to 1993]

Advisory Board

American Society for Engineering Education [MEMBEROF]
[from 1988 to 1989]

Chairman, New England Section

National Science Foundation (NSF) Engineering Advisory Committee [MEMBEROF]
[from 1989 to 1993]

Advisory Board

National Research Council (NRC) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1989 to 1993]

Advisory Board, Committee on Strategic Technologies for the Army

National Research Council (NRC) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1990 to 1992]

Advisory Board, Committee on Aeronautical Technologies

National Research Council (NRC) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1991 to 1993]

Advisory Board, Board on Engineering Education

National Research Council (NRC) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1991 to 1993]

Advisory Board, Air Force Studies Board

National Academy of Engineering (NAE) [MEMBEROF]
[from 1995 to ?]

Member