

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

PERSON

Harris, Wesley , 1941-

Alternative Names: Harris, Wesley , 1941-

Life Dates: October 29, 1941-

Place of Birth: Richmond, Virginia

Residence:

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 in 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 25, 2013.

Related Entries

Minor, Rosa [CHILD OF]

Mother

Harris, William McKinley [CHILD OF]

Father

Harris, Mary Elizabeth Harris [SIBLING OF]

Sister

Harris, Roosevelt [SIBLING OF]

Brother

Harris, Sylvester [SIBLING OF]

Brother

Harris, William, Jr. [SIBLING OF]

Brother

(née Taylor) Minor, Alice [GRANDCHILD OF]

Maternal Grandmother

Minor, Benjamin [GRANDCHILD OF]

Maternal Grandfather

Harris, James [NEPHEW OF]

Uncle

Harris, Adele [NEPHEW OF]

Aunt

Harris, Wesley, Jr. [PARENT OF]

Child

Harris, Zelda [PARENTOF]

Child

Harris, Marcus [PARENTOF]

Child

Harris, Kamau [PARENTOF]

Child

Harris, Kalomo [PARENTOF]

Child

Harris, Alevia [PARENTOF]

Child

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]

Ph.D.

Princeton University [STUDENTOF]

M.A.

University of Virginia [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to 1964]

B.S.

The University of Virginia [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1968 to 1970]

Assistant Professor

Southern University [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1970 to 1971]

Associate Professor of Physics

The University of Virginia [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1971 to 1972]

Associate Professor

Massachusetts Institute of Technology [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1972 to 1973]

Visiting Associate Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1973 to 1981]

Associate Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

Massachusetts Institute of Technology [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1973 to 1979]

Associate Professor of Ocean Engineering

NASA Headquarters [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to 1980]

Program Manager

Harris Analytics and Planning, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1985]

President and Owner

Massachusetts Institute of Technology [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1981 to 1985]

Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics

The University of Connecticut [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1985 to 1990]

Dean of the School of Engineering

UTSI [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to 1992]

Vice President and Chief Administration Officer

NASA Headquarters [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1993 to 1995]

Associate Administrator for Aeronautics

MIT Rotor Acoustics Group [MEMBEROF]
Founder and Director

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Office of Minority Education
[MEMBEROF]
Director

U.S. Army Science Board [MEMBEROF]
Advisory Board

American Society for Engineering Education [MEMBEROF]
Chairman, New England Section

NSF Engineering Advisory Committee [MEMBEROF]
Advisory Board

NRC [MEMBEROF]
Advisory Board, Committee on Strategic Technologies for the Army

NRC [MEMBEROF]

Advisory Board, Committee on Aeronautical Technologies

NRC [MEMBEROF]

Advisory Board, Board on Engineering Education

NRC [MEMBEROF]

Advisory Board, Air Force Studies Board

National Academy of Engineering [MEMBEROF]

Member