

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr.

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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>	Harris, Bernard A.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 6, 2013 and March 4, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013 and 2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:45:44).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Astronaut and medical scientist Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. (1956 - ) was best known for being the first African American to walk in space. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 6, 2013 and March 4, 2014, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_034
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Astronaut, medical scientist, and management executive Bernard A. Harris was born in Temple, Texas on June 26, 1956 to Bernard A. Harris, Sr. and Gussie Emanuel Harris. During his youth, Harris lived on the Navajo reservations of Arizona and New Mexico, where his mother found employment as a teacher. At the age of thirteen, Harris watched the first landing on the moon, and he knew that he wanted to become an astronaut. Harris's family returned to Texas shortly after, and he graduated from Sam Houston High School in San Antonio, Texas in 1974. During high school, Harris decided he wanted to be a medical doctor and so attended the University of Houston, where he earned his B.S. degree in biology in

1978, and the Texas Tech University Health Science Center of Medicine, where he received his M.D. degree in 1982. He then completed his residency in internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

Never forgetting his aspirations to become an astronaut, Harris followed a career path that would enable him to realize this dream. Upon completing his residency, Harris pursued research opportunities at Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California, and later the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, specifically taking up projects that would appeal to the interests of the astronaut selection committee. After his first application to the NASA Astronaut Corps. was declined, Harris reapplied and was invited to join the elite training group in 1990. Following the completion of intensive training, Harris was given his first assignment as a mission specialist of the Space Shuttle *Columbia* in the spring of 1993, just a few months after the birth of his daughter, Brooke Alexandria. Two years later, Harris returned to space and made history as the first African American to walk in space, where he and crew member Michael Foale tested the temperature resilience of their spacesuits.

Following his career in astronautics, Harris became an entrepreneur, working first as vice president of Spacehab, Inc. in 1996, where he worked on the commercialization of space exploration. After earning his M.B.A. degree from the University of Houston Clear Lake, Harris became executive director of Versalius Ventures in 2001.

Harris has received much recognition for his work as astronaut, entrepreneur, and as a community developer. In addition to becoming a fellow of the American College of Physicians, he is also the winner of The *Challenger* Award from the Ronald E. McNair Foundation, and recipient of the prestigious Horatio Alger Award. The Dr. Bernard A. Harris Middle School was named in his honor in 2006. That same year Harris established the ExxonMobil Bernard Harris Summer Science Camp and the Dream Tour, two STEM programs to encourage minority students to pursue an interest in the sciences.

Bernard Harris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 6, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 6, 2013 and March 4, 2014, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Astronaut and medical scientist Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. (1956 - ) was best known for being the first

African American to walk in space.

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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:**

Harris, Bernard A.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Harris, Bernard A.--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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National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center

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## **Occupations:**

Astronaut

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Medical Scientist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers|MedicalMakers

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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 Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., February 6, 2013 and March 4, 2014. 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 Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section A2013\_034\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:07 2013/02/06

Dr. Bernard Harris, who was the first African American to walk in space, describes his family background. Harris' mother, Gussie Lee Burgess, was born in 1932 in Oakwood, Texas. She was raised by her mother, grandmother, and her aunt, who served as role models during her upbringing. Gussie Burgess attended Prairie View A&M University to study home economics, and then became a teacher. Harris' father, Bernard A. Harris, Sr., was born in Philadelphia in the early 1930s. He dropped out of the inner-city school system in high school, and enlisted in the U.S. Army. Harris' parents met while his father was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas. They married in the early 1950s, and moved to Houston a few years later. After his parents' divorce in 1962, Harris, his sister,

Gillette, and his brother, Dennis, moved to Greasewood, Arizona, where his mother took a job as a teacher on the Navajo reservation.

African American families--United States.

African American parents--Employment.

Children of divorced parents.

Indian reservations--Arizona--Education.

African Americans--Relations with Indians.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section  
A2013\_034\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:50 2013/02/06

When Dr. Bernard Harris was seven years old, he moved to Greasewood, Arizona, with his siblings and his mother, who began working as a teacher on the Navajo reservation. Harris and his brother began elementary school in Greasewood, and were exposed to a multicultural upbringing on the reservation. Four years later, his family moved to another part of the reservation, in Tohatchi, New Mexico. Harris attended junior high school in Tohatchi, where he became interested in biology and chemistry. Harris also began to become engaged by America's space program in the 1960s, and describes his budding interest in aeronautics. He also describes his childhood memories of his great grandmother's farm in Texas.

Childhood--United States, Southwestern.

African Americans--Relations with Indians.

Multiculturalism--Social aspects--United States.

Astronautics--United States.

Family farms--Texas.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section  
A2013\_034\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:47 2013/02/06

Dr. Bernard Harris and his family moved from Greasewood, Arizona to Tohatchi, New Mexico in the late 1960s, where his mother was a teacher on the Navajo reservation. During his time in junior high school in Tohatchi, Harris became interested in playing the saxophone, and soon discovered a life-long talent in music. By the age of sixteen, Harris' family had relocated

to San Antonio, Texas, where he attended Sam Houston High School, and played in a band called 'The Purple Haze'. As a teenager, Harris was deeply inspired by the U.S. space program, particularly the 1969 moon landing. Harris attended the University of Houston in 1974, majoring in biology on the pre-medical tract. His medical mentor, Dr. Frank Bryant, his university professors, Ms. Kaminski and Professor Johnson, and American astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, inspired his ambitions to become a medical doctor, an entrepreneur and an astronaut, respectively.

Moving, Household.

Space flight to the moon.

Students, Premedical--minority--Texas.

University of Houston--Faculty.

Mentoring in education.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section A2013\_034\_002\_004, TRT: 4:28:46 2014/03/04

Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. attended the University of Houston in Houston, Texas, where he was active in the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and the pre-medical society. Upon receiving his bachelor's degree in biology in 1978, Harris enrolled in the medical program at the predominantly white Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas; and he joined the Student National Medical Association. He completed his residency in internal medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he also honed his interest in aerospace technology under the mentorship of Dr. Joseph Combs. Then, Harris received a National Research Council Fellowship to conduct research in disuse osteoporosis with Dr. Sara Arnaud at the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California. Around this time, in January of 1986, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded upon liftoff, although the accident did not dissuade Harris from pursuing a career in astronautics.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section A2013\_034\_002\_005, TRT: 5:27:48 2014/03/04

Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. conducted research in disuse

osteoporosis at the Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California in the early 1980s. In 1988, he applied to the NASA Astronaut Candidate Program, but was ultimately unsuccessful. However, he was hired as a researcher in the Bone and Signaling Laboratory of the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. There, he was mentored by scientist Victor S. Schneider; and he went on to become the project manager of the exercise countermeasure project in NASA's Medical Science Division. In 1989, Harris served briefly as a flight surgeon in the U.S. Air Force. Then, in 1990, he was accepted into the Astronaut Candidate Program, where he received training in ocean and desert survival, parachuting, and microgravity. For his first NASA mission, Harris was stationed at the European Astronaut Centre. He went on to serve as the payload commander and mission specialist on his second trip, which involved coordination with the Russia Space Station Mir.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section A2013\_034\_002\_006, TRT: 6:29:19 2014/03/04

Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. completed the Astronaut Candidate Program at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1991. Two years later, he completed his first mission as a NASA astronaut, operating in the role of mission specialist. At this point in the interview, Harris describes the preparations for space flight, including the donning of the space suit; and the shuttle liftoff. On the spacecraft, Harris was positioned near windows, where he was able to observe the Earth from space. Harris and his team conducted a variety of experiments in space, such as analyzing the impact of space travel on the human musculoskeletal system. Harris went on to serve as the payload commander on his second flight with NASA. During that time, he witnessed the shuttle's trajectory through the Northern Lights. Harris also describes the daily life of an astronaut, such as the availability of food and water; and the body's adjustment to zero gravity.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section A2013\_034\_002\_007, TRT: 7:31:05 2014/03/04

Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. completed his inaugural mission as

a NASA astronaut in 1993. Two years later, Harris served as the payload commander for his second flight. He became the first African American to participate in a spacewalk when he tested the integrity of space suits at the International Space Station. Throughout his career at NASA, Harris practiced medicine in the Houston, Texas area; and served on the clinical staff at Houston's Baylor College of Medicine. Upon leaving NASA, Harris was hired at Spacehab Inc., where he was eventually promoted to vice president of Space Media, Inc. He went on to obtain his M.B.A. degree from the University of Houston-Clear Lake. In 1998, Harris created The Harris Foundation in Houston, which sponsored community-oriented initiatives in education, health and economics. He then partnered with venture capitalists Jack Gill and Robert D. Ulrich to form Vesalius Ventures, Inc. Harris became the vice president of the American Telemedicine Association in 2009.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr., Section  
A2013\_034\_002\_008, TRT: 8:21:02 2014/03/04

Dr. Bernard Harris, Jr. was a founder of Vesalius Ventures, Inc., a venture capitalist firm that specialized in telemedicine. At the time of the interview, the company sought to expand its investment reach to the international market. In 2010, Harris' memoir, 'Dream Walker: A Journey of Achievement and Inspiration,' was published. He talks about his experience of bringing a Navajo Nation flag into space; and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. With his wife, Sandra Fay Lewis Harris, he had one daughter, Brooke Harris, who attended Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Harris reflects upon his life, career, legacy and spirituality. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.