

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vernon Morris

---

## 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>	Morris, Vernon R.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 29, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:54:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Atmospheric scientist Vernon Morris (1963 - ) is the director of the Howard University Component of the NASA Goddard Earth Sciences and Technology Center, director of the NOAA Center in Atmospheric Sciences, and co-director of the Laboratory for Molecular Computations and Bioinformatics at the National Institutes of Health Research Center for Minority Institutions. Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 29, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_083
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Atmospheric scientist Vernon R. Morris Vernon was born on [month day, year?] in [city, state?]. Morris graduated from Morehouse College in 1985 with his B.A. degree in chemistry and mathematics. Following graduation, he enrolled at Georgia Institute of Technology. Morris received the Regent's Scholarship and the NASA Graduate Student Research Fellowship to pursue his theoretical and experimental studies of inorganic peroxides in the Earth's stratosphere. After graduating with his Ph.D. degree in earth and atmospheric sciences from Georgia Institute of Technology in 1991, Morris was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellowship where he worked on the chemical dynamics of free radical systems important in comets and the interstellar medium.

Morris served as a part-time instructor at Spelman College while striding for his Ph.D. degree. Later, he joined Howard University's Chemistry Department as an assistant professor. In 1996, he became the deputy director of the Howard University Center for the Study of Terrestrial and Extraterrestrial Atmospheres (CSTEa). From 2001 to 2004, Morris served as the director of the Howard University Graduate Program in Atmospheric Sciences (HUPAS) and was instrumental in developing atmospheric sciences as a major focus of the university's research portfolio. Morris was then named director of the Howard University Component of the NASA Goddard Earth Sciences and Technology Center. Morris also served as director of the NOAA Center in Atmospheric Sciences (NCAS) as well as the co-director of the Laboratory for Molecular Computations and Bioinformatics at the National Institutes of Health Research Center for Minority Institutions. He was a visiting scientist at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Atmospheric Chemistry and Dynamics Branch and served briefly as chair of the chemistry department at Howard University.

Morris is a member of several scientific boards and professional organizations. He is a member of the National

Academy of Sciences Board on Atmospheric Sciences and Climate (BASC) and the Advisory Board of the Benjamin Banneker Institute for Science and Technology. Morris is also a member of the American Meteorological Society, the National Organization for the Professional Advancement of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers, the American Geophysical Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Advanced Study Institute.

His combined concentration on academic research and focus on atmospheric sciences has garnered for him recognition from professional and academic associations. Morris is a recipient of the University Merit Award, the Howard University Faculty Merit Award and Howard University's Most Productive Faculty Researcher in Natural Sciences award. Morris received the prestigious NSF Career Award from the Geosciences Directorate for his research on the photochemistry of carbonaceous aerosols.

Vernon R. Morris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 29, 2013.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vernon Morris was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 29, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Atmospheric scientist Vernon Morris (1963 - ) is the director of the Howard University Component of the NASA Goddard Earth Sciences and Technology Center, director of the NOAA Center in Atmospheric Sciences, and co-director of the Laboratory for Molecular Computations and Bioinformatics at the National Institutes of Health Research Center for Minority Institutions.

---

## 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:

Morris, Vernon R.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Morris, Vernon R.--Interviews

---

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

**Occupations:**

Atmospheric Scientist

---

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

ScienceMakers

---

**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 Vernon Morris, March 29, 2013. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:49  
2013/03/29

Vernon Morris describes his family background. Morris' mother, Gloria Robinson Morris, was born in Port Arthur, Texas in 1932. She was raised primarily by her great-grandmother, and attended Our Lady of the Lake School and Bishop College in Texas. She earned her master's degree in education, and spent her career as a teacher and an educator, becoming the first African American school principal in Spokane, Washington. Morris' father, Billy Verlett Morris, was born in Arkansas City, Kansas in 1930. He joined the U.S. Air Force before attending college, and then completed his college degree while Morris was in high school. Morris talks about his father's career in the Air Force, and his family's frequent relocations across the country and also to Japan. In this section of the tape, Morris also recollects his childhood memories and his visits to the national parks with his family.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:20  
2013/03/29

Vernon Morris and his family relocated frequently, while his father served in the U.S. Air Force. Morris grew up in Tokyo, Detroit, and Spokane, Washington. He began school in Tokyo, where he learned Japanese, and recalls his favorite teacher, Mrs. Nakanishi. He returned to the United States after the first grade, and attended elementary school in Detroit, followed by middle and high school in Spokane. Morris talks about the shift in his cultural experiences from a multi-ethnic community in Japan, to an all-black school in Detroit, to a predominantly Caucasian school and community in Spokane. Morris recalls racial biases in Spokane, and never being selected to present at a science fair. He describes his impressive bug collection for his middle school science project. Morris also talks about his interest in nature, reading books and watching TV shows about exploration, tinkering with gadgets, collecting stamps, and listening to music.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:29  
2013/03/29

Vernon Morris attended Mead High School in Spokane, Washington. Although his academic performance remained exemplary, Morris did not feel welcome at

the school. He talks about his involvement in sports in the community, and his connection with Bethel AME Church and the African American community that surrounded the church. As a teenager, Morris was fascinated by the space age, and used his brother's telescope to observe the night sky. Morris' parents emphasized education from an early age. He attributes his decision to attend college to a network of African American college students that his parents had created for him. His decision was also strongly influenced by his father returning to school to earn a college degree. In 1981, Morris enrolled at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He describes his trip from Spokane to Atlanta, and his first encounter with the chemistry professor, Henry McBay, who influenced his decision to major in chemistry and math.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:06  
2013/03/29

In 1981, Vernon Morris began his undergraduate studies in chemistry and mathematics at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Morris credits Morehouse for being the place where he received his formative education. At Morehouse, Morris was taught and influenced by legendary professors, Henry McBay, John Hall, Jr., Carlisle Moore, Marcellus Barksdale and J.K. Haynes. Morris was also involved in sports such as soccer, mentored students at the Frederick Douglass Tutorial Institute, and participated in the voter education project during the 1984 Democratic presidential campaign where Reverend Jesse Jackson, Jr. was running for U.S. President. He describes his social and extracurricular activities in college, and his experience in Atlanta. Morris also did research at Morehouse College under the guidance of HistoryMaker, John Hall, Jr. He describes his relationship with John Hall and the details of his experimental work on matrix isolation of short-lived chemical intermediates that influence atmospheric chemistry.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_005, TRT: 5:32:16  
2013/03/29

In 1985, Vernon Morris began his Ph.D. degree in geophysical sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech), where his dissertation was focused on the investigation of short-lived organic compounds of stratospheric significance. He shares his reasons for deciding to study at Georgia Tech, where he was mentored by HistoryMaker, John Hall, and later by Doug Davis. Morris talks about becoming the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in geophysical sciences from Georgia Tech, the lack of diversity within the program, and the need for a support structure for African American graduate students there. He completed his degree requirements in the fall of 1990, and then spent a few months as a postdoctoral trainee at the NATO Advanced Study Institute in Italy. He also explained the causes and implications of the depletion of the ozone layer, and shares his perspectives on climate change and global

warming.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:09  
2013/03/29

In 1990, Vernon Morris began his postdoctoral research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. He describes his experience there. In 1992, he moved into a postdoctoral position at the University of California, Davis, with HistoryMaker, William Jackson. Morris then joined the faculty of the Department of Chemistry at Howard University in 1994, where he became the deputy director of the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) Center for the Study of Terrestrial and Extraterrestrial Atmospheres. He received the prestigious National Science Foundation (NSF) Career Award in 1997 and was involved in conceiving and establishing the Howard University Program in Atmospheric Sciences (HUPAS) in 1998. In 1999, he served as a visiting scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in the Atmospheric Chemistry and Dynamics Branch. Morris returned to Howard University in 2000, where he became the director of the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Center in Atmospheric Sciences.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:01  
2013/03/29

In the early 2000s, Vernon Morris became involved with the AEROSE (Aerosol and Oceanographic Science Expeditions) project. AEROSE focused on studying how dust and smoke emissions from the African continent influence a regional and global scale phenomena, such as weather patterns in the tropical Atlantic, and the throughput of biological mass between continents. In this section of the interview, Morris shares the details of the history, findings, and funding for the AEROSE project. Morris also talks about the involvement of students on the project, and the parallels between the AEROSE expeditions and historic passages along the same route. He closes this section by describing the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Center in Atmospheric Sciences (NCAS) Weather Camp, which aims to provide middle school and high school students access to the atmospheric and climate sciences.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon Morris, Section A2013\_083\_001\_008, TRT: 8:25:03  
2013/03/29

In this final section of the interview, Vernon Morris describes the work of the

NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Center for Atmospheric Sciences (NCAS) at Howard University, and their projects in Africa. He emphasizes the need to communicate the center's work and its impact for the Howard University community. He also talks about collaborating with the Department of African Studies at Howard University to establish a cultural understanding of the NCAS project sites in Africa. He also reflects upon his future career goals and his legacy, and discusses his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Morris closes the interview by talking about his daughters and his family, and shares how he would like to be remembered.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.