

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Lee Harris, Jr.

PERSON

Harris, Robert L.

**Alternative Names:** Robert Lee Harris, Jr.;

**Life Dates:** April 23, 1943-

**Place of Birth:** Chicago, Illinois, USA

**Residence:** Fulton, MD

**Occupations:** African American History Professor

## Biographical Note

Professor Robert L. Harris, Jr. was born on April 23, 1943 in Chicago, Illinois to Robert and Ruby Harris. Growing up in Chicago, Harris attended St. Finbarr Elementary School and St. Philip High School. He graduated with his B.A. degree in history in 1966, and then his M.A. degree with honors in history in 1968; both from Roosevelt University. Harris went on to receive his Ph.D. degree from Northwestern University in 1974.

Harris was hired as a sixth grade teacher at Chicago's St. Rita Elementary School in 1965. Then, in 1968 and 1969, he worked at Miles College in Birmingham, Alabama, as an instructor of social science. In 1972, Harris was hired as an assistant professor of American history at the University of Illinois, where he taught until 1975. He went on to work as an assistant professor of African American history at the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University from 1975 until 1982, when he was promoted to associate professor. Harris also served as the director of the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University from 1986 until 1991, and then as special assistant to the provost of Cornell University from 1994 through 2000. He then was named vice provost for diversity and faculty development in 2000, and served in that position until 2008.

In 2004, Harris was promoted to full professor of African American history at Cornell University, and, in 2010, he was again hired as director of the Africana Studies and Research Center. In 2013, Harris was made both a graduate school professor of African and African American Studies and professor emeritus of African American history, American studies, and public affairs.

Harris authored *Teaching African-American History*, published by the American Historical Association, in 2001. He also co-edited *The Columbia Guide to African American History Since 1939*, which was published in 2006. In all, Harris has written thirteen individual book chapters, thirty scholarly articles, and eight dictionary entries. He has served on boards and committees of numerous organizations, including the De Witt Historical Society of Tompkins County, the New York Council for the Humanities, the American Historical Association, the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, the Organization of American Historians, the Society for History Education, and the National History Center. Harris also served as the president of the Association for the Study of Afro-

American Life and History from 1991 until 1992. He has been awarded fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Smithsonian Institution, and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University. Harris also received the James A. Perkins Prize in 2000 and the Cook Award in 2008 from Cornell University. In 2003, he was awarded the Carter G. Woodson Scholar's Medallion for Distinguished Research, Writing and Activism from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Harris is also National Historian for Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Robert L. Harris, Jr. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 22, 2013.

## Related Entries

**Roosevelt University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Bachelor's**

**Northwestern University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Ph.D.**

**Roosevelt University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Master's**

**St. Finbarr School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**St. Malachy School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**St. Philip Basilica High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**H.S.**

**St. Rita Elementary** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1989 to 1996]

**6th Grade Teacher**

**Miles College** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1986 to 1994]

**Social Science Instructor**

**University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1992 to 1998]

**Assistant Professor**

**Cornell University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1975 to 1982]

**Assistant Professor**

**Cornell University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1982 to 2004]

**Associate Professor**

**Cornell University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2000 to 2008]

**Vice Provost**

**Cornell University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1985 to ?]

**Professor**

**Association for the Study of African American Life  
and History (ASALH)** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1991 to 1992]

**President**

**International Exchange of Scholars** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 1992 to 1993]

**Chair, American History Comm.**

**American Historical Association** [MEMBEROF]

[from 1994 to 1995]

**Chair, Program Comm.**

**Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated** [MEMBEROF]

[from 1999 to ?]

**National Historian**

**National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

[MEMBEROF]

[from 2008 to 2010]

**Co-Chair/History Comm.**