

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Judith Jamison

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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>	Jamison, Judith
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Judith Jamison,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 30, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2 uncompressed MOV digital video files (0:59:36).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Dancer and choreographer Judith Jamison (1943 - ) gained international acclaim as a dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, before taking over as the company's artistic director in 1989 following the death of founder Alvin Ailey. Jamison was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 30, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_014
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dancer and choreographer Judith Jamison was born on May 10, 1943 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Tessie Brown Jamison and John Jamison, Sr. While encouraged by her parents to study the piano and violin, Jamison gravitated towards ballet. At the age of six, Jamison began taking lessons at the Judimar School of Dance in Philadelphia. She went on to study the techniques of African American dance pioneer Katherine Dunham. Jamison graduated from Germantown High School in Philadelphia, and enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. However, she left Fisk to study dance and kinesiology at the

Philadelphia Dance Academy, now part of New York City's University of the Arts.

In 1964, Jamison earned critical acclaim for her work with choreographer Agnes de Mille and the American Ballet Theatre in New York. A year later, Alvin Ailey invited Jamison to join the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, where she was featured in numerous productions, toured with the company to Africa and Europe and earned international acclaim for her signature performance of *Cry*, a fifteen minute solo piece written by Ailey for Jamison. Jamison went on to appear as a guest performer with the San Francisco Ballet, the Swedish Royal Ballet, the Cullberg Ballet, and the Vienna State Ballet. In 1980, Jamison performed on Broadway in Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Ladies* with Gregory Hines. That same year, Jamison began her own work as a choreographer. She premiered her first ballet, *Divining*, with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1984. In 1988, Jamison founded The Jamison Project Dance Company.

Jamison returned to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1989, assuming the role of artistic director following the death of founder Alvin Ailey. In 1993, Jamison choreographed *Hymn*, a tribute to Ailey, and published her autobiography, *Dancing Spirit*. Under her leadership, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater joined forces with Fordham University to establish a joint bachelor of fine arts program with a multicultural dance curriculum. Jamison also spearheaded the construction of the company's first permanent home, the Joan Weill Center for Dance. Although Jamison stepped down as artistic director in 2011, she remained associated with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater as artistic director emerita.

Judith Jamison was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 30, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Judith Jamison was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 30, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 2 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Dancer and choreographer Judith Jamison (1943 - ) gained international acclaim as a dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, before taking over as the company's artistic director in 1989 following the death of founder Alvin Ailey.

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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:**

Jamison, Judith

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Jamison, Judith--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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Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

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## **Occupations:**

Dancer

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Choreographer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers

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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 Judith Jamison, August 30, 2016. 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 Judith Jamison, Section  
A2016\_014\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:51 2016/08/30

Judith Jamison was born on May 10, 1943 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Tessie Brown Jamison and John Jamison, Sr. Jamison grew up with her parents and older brother, John Jamison, Jr., in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, where she played in Fairmount Park and attended theater shows. Jamison's father was a talented carpenter, and played classical piano at home, while her mother ran the household, and was involved with the ministries of Philadelphia's Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. There, Jamison sang gospel music, and listened to the sermons of Charles E. Stewart. Jamison was an unusually tall child who required corrective shoes, so her mother enrolled her in dance classes at Marion Cuyjet's Judimar School of Dance to teach her grace and self-pride. Jamison excelled, and Cuyjet secured lessons for her with notable dancers such as Antony Tudor and Yuri Gottschalk. In addition to ballet, Jamison learned the Katherine Dunham technique, and studied tap with Veda Ann Bernardino.

Video Oral History Interview with Judith Jamison, Section  
A2016\_014\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:45 2016/08/30

Judith Jamison grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she was exposed to the arts at the Rodin Museum

and jazz clubs like Pep's Musical Bar. Jamison attended the majority-white Charles W. Henry Elementary School and Germantown High School in Philadelphia, and studied at Marion Cuyjet's Judimar School of Dance. Upon graduation, Jamison matriculated at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she soon realized that she missed dancing. Jamison left Fisk University, and enrolled at the Philadelphia Dance Academy. There, she saw Alvin Ailey dance with his company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, for the first time in 1963. Jamison went on to dance with Agnes de Mille's American Ballet Theatre for several years, and auditioned for Ailey's company in 1965. She thought her audition went poorly, but received a personal call from Ailey asking her to join the company a few days later. Jamison also describes the company's style of dance and diverse repertoire.