

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with J. Herman Blake

PERSON

Blake, J. Herman

**Alternative Names:** J. Herman Blake; John Herman Blake

**Life Dates:** March 15, 1934-

**Place of Birth:** Mt. Vernon, New York, USA

**Residence:** Summerville, SC

**Occupations:** Sociology Professor; University President

## Biographical Note

Born John Herman Blake on March 15, 1934, Blake grew up in Mount Vernon, New York, as one of seven children raised by his single mother, Lylace E. Blake. Blake's family lived in poverty, surviving only by welfare. Blake's mother encouraged each of her children to participate and excel in school; all seven children completed high school; six received bachelor's degrees; five achieved master's degrees; and two earned doctorate degrees.

After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Blake continued his education with the assistance of the G.I. Bill; he enrolled in New York University in 1955, and received his B.A. degree in sociology in 1960. Blake went on to receive his M.A. degree and his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. In 1966, Blake, as the Assistant Professor of Sociology, became the first African American on the University of California Santa Cruz faculty. During his eighteen year tenure, Blake also served as the Founding Provost of Oakes College at the University of California Santa Cruz.

After leaving the University of California Santa Cruz, Blake served as the President of Tougaloo College until 1987; held positions at Swarthmore College; served as the Vice Chancellor at Indiana University; and served as the Director of African American Studies at Iowa State University. In 2002, Blake was named Iowa Professor of the Year and received an Honorary Degree from Indiana University. In addition to his career in education, Blake published several projects including *Revolutionary Suicide*, an autobiography of Huey P. Newton, which was the result of his research on black militants in urban areas.

Blake also researched many other topics; his work made him a leading authority on the

Gullah culture. Additionally, Blake served as the Scholar in Residence and Director of the Sea Island Institute at the University of South Carolina, Beaufort, an institution whose primary focus is the study and promotion of Gullah Cultures. In 2008, the Medical University of South Carolina appointed Blake as the first Humanities Scholar in Residence. Blake served as an advisor to the University's Humanities Committee and to the President and Provost on matters of cultural enrichment.

## Related Entries

**Northeastern Academy** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**New York University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**University of California, Berkeley** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ph.D.**

**University of California Santa Cruz** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Assistant Professor**

**Iowa State University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Assistant Professor**

**Tougaloo College** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1987 to 1988]

**President**

**NAACP** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Chapter President**

**Black Panther Party** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Penn Center** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Board Member**

**Beaufort-Jasper-Hampton Comprehensive Health Services, Inc.** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Kinte Library Project** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Researcher/Writer**

**Black American Law Students Association** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Review Board**