

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr.

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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>	Carson, Ben
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 12, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:25:16).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Neurosurgeon and medical director Dr. Benjamin Carson, Sr. (1951 - ) was known for his groundbreaking work in neurosurgery, particularly for the operation he performed in 1987 to separate infant conjoined twins, who were attached at the head. Carson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 12, 2010, in Upperco, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_075
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Neurosurgeon, medical director, foundation executive and author Dr. Benjamin Solomon Carson, Sr. was born on September 18, 1951 in Detroit Michigan, to Sonya and Robert Solomon Carson. After the couple separated, Carson and his brother Curtis lived with their mother. Although she worked several jobs at a time, Sonya supported the family and played a tremendous role in shaping the lives of her sons. Upon seeing her sons' poor performance in school, Sonya required them to read regularly and to present her with weekly book reports, although she herself only had a third grade education and had difficulty reading.

In 1969, Carson graduated with honors as the student "Most likely to succeed," from Southwestern High School, a public school located in southwest Detroit, Michigan. During his early years, although Carson had improved his grades considerably, he had to overcome his temper. After an incident in which he almost stabbed a friend, Carson made up his mind to change his ways. Upon receiving his high school diploma, Carson attended Yale University, where he would meet his future wife, Lacena "Candy" Rustin. After graduating from Yale University with his B.A. degree in psychology in 1973, he went on to the University of Michigan School of Medicine. After receiving his M.D. degree in 1977, Carson trained at Johns Hopkins University, where he completed his internship in general surgery and his residency in neurological surgery. In 1983, Carson traveled to Perth, Australia to serve as a senior registrar in neurosurgery at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. A year later, he returned to Johns Hopkins and by the following year was named Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery. In 1987, through a ground-breaking surgical procedure, Carson successfully separated conjoined twins who were attached at the head.

Outside of his work as a world-renowned surgeon, Carson has been civically active. Using his own life story as a background, Carson has written four motivational books, which include: "Gifted Hands" in 1990, "The Big Picture" in 2000, "Think Big" in 2006, and "Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk" in 2007. The first of these works served as the inspiration for a film of the same title, in which Cuba

Gooding, Jr. plays the role of Carson. Carson has also created three foundations—the Carson Scholars Fund, the Ben Carson Reading Project, and Angels of the Operating Room. He serves on the board of directors of the Kellogg Company and Costco Wholesale Corporation. In 2008, President George W. Bush presented Carson with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award.

Carson and his wife have three sons, Murray Nedlands, Benjamin Solomon, Jr. and Rhoeyce Harrington.

Dr. Benjamin Carson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 12, 2010.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 12, 2010, in Upperco, Maryland, and was recorded on 3 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Neurosurgeon and medical director Dr. Benjamin Carson, Sr. (1951 - ) was known for his groundbreaking work in neurosurgery, particularly for the operation he performed in 1987 to separate infant conjoined twins, who were attached at the head.

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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:

Carson, Ben

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Carson, Ben--Interviews

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African American neurosurgeons--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

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African American physicians--Maryland--Baltimore--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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Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital

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Johns Hopkins Hospital

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## Occupations:

Neurosurgeon

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Medical Director

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

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 The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr., July 12, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr., Section  
A2010\_075\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Dr. Benjamin Carson, Sr. was born on September 18, 1951 in Detroit, Michigan to Sonya Copeland Carson and Robert Carson III. His maternal great-great-grandfather, John Ash, was a slave who was born in Africa in 1770. Generations later, Carson's father was employed as a Baptist preacher and factory worker at the Cadillac Automobile Company in Detroit, where Carson began his education at the Fisher School. In 1959, Carson's parents separated, and he moved with his mother and brother to Boston, Massachusetts, where they lived in Roxbury with his maternal aunt and uncle, Mattie Copeland Morris and Robert Morris, Sr. In Boston, Carson witnessed urban violence, including the deaths of two cousins; and his education was hampered by the limited facilities at the Berea Seventh-day Adventist Church school. His family returned to Detroit, where he was bullied at a predominantly white public school. His mother encouraged Carson to read independently, which gave him the skills to improve academically.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

African American families--Massachusetts--Boston.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Massachusetts--Boston.

General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists--Education.

African Americans--Books and reading.

Single parents.

Substance abuse.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr., Section  
A2010\_075\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:08 ?

Dr. Benjamin Carson, Sr. attended Southwestern High School in Detroit, Michigan, and worked as the school laboratory assistant. His brother, Curtis Carson, was a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and enlisted in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War; and, inspired by his brother's efforts, Carson joined the ROTC and graduated from high school as the company commander. He then applied to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, which he chose over Harvard University because of their strong performance on the 'College Bowl' trivia show. Carson aspired to become a psychiatrist; and, while enrolled at Yale University, studied under noted psychoanalysts Anna Freud and Erik Erikson. He went on to attend the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor, where he switched his focus to neuroscience. Carson talks about his experiences of discrimination in the medical field, and his reliance on religion and literature to curtail his temper.

African Americans--Books and reading.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Michigan--Detroit.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Michigan--Detroit.

Science--Study and teaching--Michigan--Detroit.

United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Benjamin Carson, Sr., Section  
A2010\_075\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:58 ?

Dr. Benjamin Carson, Sr. earned a bachelor's degree from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where he studied psychology. At the time, the faculty included psychoanalysts Anna Freud and Erik Erikson, as well as neuroscientists Ruth S. Day and Jay Braun. During his first year at the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor, Carson began studying neuroscience, which was a predominantly white field. After some initial struggles because of his race, he was selected for an internship under Chairman Robert Schneider of the neurosurgery department. When Schneider retired, Carson continued his residency at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. There, Carson met black surgical technician Vivien Thomas, who developed the procedure to treat blue baby syndrome. He also faced discrimination from the white hospital staff, who often assumed he was an orderly. Additionally, Carson talks about the Reading Room project, through which he sponsored reading rooms in schools across the country.

Yale University.

University of Michigan. Medical School.

African American medical students.

Thomas, Vivien T., 1910-1985.

Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

Neurosurgeons.

African Americans--Marriage.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.