

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Henry Mitchell

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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>	Mitchell, Henry H.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 16, 2010
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:36:06).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Religion professor and religious leader Reverend Dr. Henry Mitchell (1919 - 2022) held positions as a professor of religion and African American history, including as the first Martin Luther King Jr. Professor of Black Church Studies at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School. He also served as founding director of the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies, in Los Angeles, California, and pastored the Second Baptist Church in Fresno, California, and the Cavalry Baptist Church in Santa Monica, California. Mitchell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 16, 2010, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2010_084
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Religious leader and religion professor Reverend Dr. Henry Mitchell was born on September 10, 1919, in Columbus, Ohio, to Bertha and Orlando Mitchell. He received his B.A. degree from Lincoln University, in Oxford, Pennsylvania, his B.D. and M.Div. degrees from Union Theological Seminary, in New York, New York, his M.A. degree from California State University, Fresno, and his Th.D. degree from Claremont School of Theology, in Claremont, California.

Mitchell served from 1945-1959 as a denominational staff person in Northern California and then as pastor of Second Baptist Church in Fresno, California, and Cavalry Baptist Church in Santa Monica, California. In 1969, he became the first Martin Luther King Jr. Professor of Black Church Studies at the consortium of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Bexley Hall, and Crozer Theological Seminary. He also served as professor of religion and Pan-African Studies at California State University, Northridge and academic dean and professor of history and homiletics at the Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University. In 1988, Mitchell and his wife, the late Reverend Dr. Ella Pearson Mitchell, began team teaching as visiting professors of homiletics at the Interdenominational Theological Center. They became well known for their team teaching and preaching style, where they would speak to their audience in dialogue with each other. They also mentored students in the Doctor of Ministry program at the United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Mitchell served as the founding director of the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies, in Los Angeles, and wrote a book on the history of the African American church called *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years*, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art*, a history of African American preaching styles, *Fire in The Well*, a collections of sermons Mitchell and his wife have given, and *Together For*

*Good: Lessons From Fifty-Five Years of Marriage*, Mitchell and his wife's joint autobiography. He has also co-authored the book *Preaching for Black Self-Esteem*.

Mitchell was awarded an honorary D.D. degree by the American Baptist Seminary of the West and an honorary L.H.D. degree by Lincoln University. He and his wife also were the recipients of the 2008 Union Theological Seminary Trailblazer Award.

Reverend Dr. Henry Mitchell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 16, 2010.

Mitchell passed away on January 15, 2022, at the age of 102.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell was conducted by Denise Gines on July 16, 2010, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Religion professor and religious leader Reverend Dr. Henry Mitchell (1919 - 2022) held positions as a professor of religion and African American history, including as the first Martin Luther King Jr. Professor of Black Church Studies at the Colgate Rochester Divinity School. He also served as founding director of the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies, in Los Angeles, California, and pastored the Second Baptist Church in Fresno, California, and the Cavalry Baptist Church in Santa Monica, California.

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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:

Mitchell, Henry H.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Mitchell, Henry H.--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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## Occupations:

Religious Leader

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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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 Reverend Henry Mitchell, July 16, 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell was born on September 10, 1919 in Columbus, Ohio to Bertha Estis Mitchell and Orlando Mitchell. His paternal great-grandmother escaped from slavery and fled to Canada, where she met his paternal great-grandfather, soldier Thomas Mitchell, who was Scots-Irish. Mitchell's paternal grandfather, Henry Mitchell, studied to become a Baptist minister at Lincoln University. He married Laura Parsons Mitchell, with whom he raised Mitchell's father in Virginia. They moved to Columbus when Mitchell's father was a teenager. Mitchell's maternal grandfather, Henry Estis, was a carpenter and preacher; and, with Mitchell's maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Lewis Estis, raised Mitchell's mother in Chillicothe, Iowa. She married Mitchell's father, who worked as a mechanic and postman in Columbus, where they raised three sons. After Mitchell's youngest brother, Elbert Mitchell, contracted whooping cough, he and his brother, Louis Mitchell, were sent to live with their maternal grandmother in Chillicothe.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. The community was located beside the railroad tracks, where the railway company allowed the residents to garden. Mitchell's family lived in a makeshift house on Harvard Avenue, where he helped his father, Orlando Mitchell, install the electrical wiring. Mitchell began his education at the Eastwood School, which was located between his community and a wealthy, white neighborhood. During Mitchell's final year at the school, the district was gerrymandered to exclude the African American community, and his younger brothers were transferred to an all-black school. Mitchell went on to attend Columbus' Pilgrim Junior High School and East High School. He excelled in mathematics, and developed an interest in mechanics, once building a scooter and a pontoon boat. In addition, Mitchell was active with the Boy Scouts, and sang in the choir of Columbus' Second Baptist Church, where his family belonged to the congregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell attended East High School in Columbus, Ohio. He graduated at the top of his class in 1937; and, shortly afterwards, was called to the ministry. Mitchell matriculated at The Ohio State University, where he joined the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. However, he disliked the school's Reserve Officers' Training Corps requirement; and, after one year, decided to transfer to his paternal grandfather's alma mater, Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. There, Mitchell excelled academically, and served as a teaching assistant to Professor Joseph Newton Hill, one of the few African American faculty. He lessened his fraternity involvement; and, instead, led a student radical group, served as secretary of the student body and traveled with the glee club. Over the summers, he worked as a lifeguard during the day, and as an elevator operator at night. When the draft was implemented during World War I, Mitchell declared himself a conscientious objector.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell was licensed to preach in 1939, while he was a student at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. After earned a bachelor's degree in English, he planned to attend seminary at Oberlin College, but was persuaded by a friend to enroll at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. There, Mitchell was awarded a scholarship, but lost it after carrying out several pranks. He also became acquainted with fellow seminary student Ella Pearson Mitchell, whom he married shortly after receiving his degree in 1944. Mitchell's father initially suggested that they marry, and Mitchell reached the same conclusion through prayer. During seminary, Mitchell was taught by theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. While enrolled in Tillich's course on religious symbolism, Mitchell began to recognize the value of theological traditions that were unique to the black community. He became an expert on African American religion and culture, and went on to publish 'Black Preaching.'

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:17 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell graduated from the Union Theological Seminary in 1944. He served for one year as the dean of the chapel at the North Carolina College for Negroes in Durham, where he also taught two English courses. He then left the South to work as a field secretary for the Northern California Baptist Association. In this role, he helped build and organize churches for African Americans who moved west in search of employment during World War II. During the war, Mitchell's brother, Louis Mitchell, worked among the Japanese community in California; and his youngest brother, Elbert Mitchell, married a Japanese woman. After moving to California, Mitchell and his wife had three children: Henry Mitchell IV, Muriel Mitchell Lawrence and Elizabeth Mitchell Clement. Mitchell recalls his experiences of sympathetic morning sickness during his wife's first pregnancy. He also reflects upon his theology, which emphasized the importance of religious experiences over ideas.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell served from 1959 as the pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Fresno, California, where he preached about the issues facing African Americans, and created tutoring and sports programs for the youth. He also organized civil rights demonstrations in Fresno, one of which was attended by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He went on to serve as the pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Santa Monica, California from 1966 to 1969. That year, Mitchell was awarded the first Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Professorship of Black Church Studies at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York. While on leave due to an illness, he earned a Th.D. degree from the Claremont School of Theology in California. In 1982, he joined the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology in Richmond, Virginia as a history professor and dean. Mitchell later founded the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies in Los Angeles, California; and, in 1989, joined his wife in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell was the founding director of the Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies in Los Angeles, California. He published many theological texts, including 'Black Preaching' and 'Preaching for Black Self-Esteem.' Mitchell wrote several books with his wife, Ella Pearson Mitchell,

including a collection of sermons and an autobiography of their marriage called 'Together for Good.' The couple also taught courses together at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, Mitchell published 'Black Church Beginnings,' a history of the African American church, which was influenced by the oral traditions of Mitchell's grandfathers, who were Baptist preachers. He talks about the Silver Bluff Baptist Church on South Carolina's Beech Island, which was among the first African American Baptist congregations; and Ohio's Providence Association of Churches, which helped escaped slaves flee to Canada. Mitchell reflects upon his legacy, and the role of women in the black church.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Henry Mitchell, Section A2010\_084\_001\_008, TRT: 0:10:14 ?

Reverend Henry Mitchell narrates his photographs.