

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lloyd N. Ferguson

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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>	Ferguson, Lloyd N.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 25, 2011 and April 27, 2011
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2011
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:37:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Chemistry professor and chemist Lloyd N. Ferguson (1918 - 2011 ) was instrumental in building the doctoral program in chemistry at Howard University, the first of its kind at any historically black college or university. He joined the faculty of California State University, Los Angeles in 1965 and co-founded the National Organization for Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCCChE). Ferguson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2011 and April 27, 2011, in Playa Vista, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2011_030
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chemist and chemistry professor Lloyd Noel Ferguson was born on February 9, 1918 in Oakland, California to Noel Ferguson, a businessman, and Gwendolyn Ferguson, a house maid. Ferguson's interest in chemistry began when he was a child. He built a shed in his backyard so that he could conduct experiments away from his house. Ferguson skipped two grades, and although an illness kept him out of school for a year, he was able to graduate from Oakland Tech High School in 1934, when he was just sixteen. After high school, Ferguson worked with the Works Progress Administration and soon thereafter, the Southern Pacific Railway Company as a porter to save money to attend college. In 1936, Ferguson became the first in his family to attend college, and he earned his B.S. degree with honors in chemistry from University of California, Berkeley in 1940. Ferguson then earned his Ph.D. degree in chemistry from University of California, Berkeley in 1943, making him the first African American to do so. While at Berkeley, Ferguson worked with Dr. Melvin Calvin on a national defense project, the purpose of which was to find a material that would release oxygen for use in a submarine if it was ever needed.

In 1945, after working at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina, Ferguson received an offer to join the faculty of Howard University in Washington D.C. He became a full professor of chemistry at Howard University in 1955, and in 1958 Ferguson became the head of the chemistry department. During his tenure, Ferguson was instrumental in building the first doctoral program in chemistry at any historically black college or university. In 1952 he was elected to the prestigious American Chemical Society. In 1965, Ferguson joined the faculty of California State University, Los Angeles, where he chaired the department of chemistry from 1968 to 1971. Throughout his academic career, Ferguson pursued many scientific interests including: the chemistry of carbon-based molecules, the organic nature of taste sensations, and cancer-causing agents. Ferguson received the California State University CSU Outstanding Professor Award in 1974 and in 1981. In 1976 Ferguson received the Distinguished American Medallion from the American Foundation for Negro

Affairs. Ferguson was the only African American to receive an ACS award in chemical education in 1978. He has published seven textbooks and has written over fifty journal articles. He has also helped to develop programs such as Support of the Educationally and Economically Disadvantaged and the Minority Biomedical Research Program that encourage young minority students wishing to pursue higher education and careers in science. In 1972, Ferguson co-founded the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers. He retired from California State University in Los Angeles in 1986.

Ferguson has a scholarship named after him at the California State University, Los Angeles. He received an honorary Ph.D. degree in chemistry from Howard University. Ferguson is married to Charlotte Welch, and they have raised three adult children, Lloyd, Jr., Stephen, and Lisa.

Lloyd N. Ferguson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 25, 2011.

Lloyd N. Ferguson passed away on November 30, 2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 25, 2011 and April 27, 2011, in Playa Vista, California, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chemistry professor and chemist Lloyd N. Ferguson (1918 - 2011 ) was instrumental in building the doctoral program in chemistry at Howard University, the first of its kind at any historically black college or university. He joined the faculty of California State University, Los Angeles in 1965 and co-founded the National Organization for Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE).

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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:

Ferguson, Lloyd N.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Ferguson, Lloyd N.--Interviews

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African American chemists--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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University of California, Berkeley Howard University California State University, Los Angeles

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## Occupations:

Chemist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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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 Lloyd N. Ferguson, April 25, 2011 and April 27, 2011. 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 Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:22  
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Lloyd Ferguson talks briefly about his family background. His mother, Gwendolyn Louise Johnson Ferguson, was born in Oakland, California and worked as an elevator operator at a clothing store. Ferguson's father, Noel Swithin Ferguson, came from Jamaica to California, and he owned an apartment building in California. Ferguson spent his childhood in Oakland, going back and forth from his parents' home to his nearby grandparents' home. He had a chemistry set in his childhood backyard laboratory, and he would create cleaning products to sell to people. During the depression, Ferguson's father lost his job and had to give up the apartment building due to financial difficulties. Out of desperation and frustration, he tried to burn down the building and spent time in jail for arson.

African American families—California.

Chemistry sets.

Great Depression.

African American fathers.

Arson--Psychological aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:53  
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Lloyd Ferguson talks about being on an academic track during high school. He graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1934 and then went on to work at the WPA (Works Progress Administration) before attending the University of California, Berkeley. During college he worked at the Southern Pacific Railroad as a "red cap," carrying bags for passengers. He stayed on at Berkeley through his Ph.D. and he was among other notable scientists such as Melvin Calvin, Ermon Eastman; Willard Libby; William F. Giaque, Glenn Seaborg, and Edwin McMillan. Ferguson worked on a project with the goal of finding a compound that could successfully release oxygen into a submarine while under water.

African American high school students—California.

United States. Work Projects Administration.

African American porters.

University of California, Berkeley--Students.

Scientists--Intellectual life--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:55

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Lloyd Ferguson earned his B.S. degree in 1940 from the University of California, Berkeley. He then worked in the radiation laboratory at Berkeley with Melvin Calvin on a national defense project. Ferguson continued at Berkeley working towards his Ph.D. degree under advisor, G.E.K. Branch. Upon receiving his Ph.D. degree in, Ferguson and his wife, Charlotte Welch, moved to Greensboro, North Carolina so he could teach organic chemistry at North Carolina A&T State University. In 1945, Ferguson was hired into the Department of Chemistry at Howard University in Washington D.C. by Howard President Mordecai Johnson. His main task was to establish a Ph.D. chemistry program at Howard, which he did successfully. Some of Ferguson's contemporaries at Howard were Thurgood Marshall, Ralph Bunche, Ernest Just, Percy Julian, and W. Montague Cobb. Throughout his career, Ferguson wrote seven textbooks.

Degrees, Academic.

Calvin, Melvin, 1911-1997

College science teachers.

Howard University.

Famous African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:33  
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Lloyd Ferguson continues to talk about his time at Howard University studying organic chemistry, which is the chemistry of carbon-containing compounds. He considers his greatest accomplishment to be the textbooks that he wrote, the first of which, "Electron Structures of Organic Molecules," was published in 1952. Ferguson also conducted research on the color and taste properties of organic compounds at Howard. Other contemporaries include Herman Branson, David Blackwell, and Lawrence Robinson. In 1953, Ferguson and his family went to Copenhagen, Denmark where he worked at the Carlsberg Laboratorium. In 1958, Ferguson became the head of the chemistry department at Howard. He explains the differences in resource acquisition at different types of schools. In 1965, Ferguson accepted a position at California State University, Los Angeles where he was in charge of the research program in physical organic chemistry.

Chemistry, Organic.

Textbooks--Authorship.

African American scientists.

Carlsberg laboratoriet.

California State University, Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_001\_005, TRT: 5:17:21  
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Lloyd Ferguson talks about his involvement in various professional organizations such as the Food and Drug Administration in 1966 and the American Chemical Society's Project SEED in 1968. Ferguson became head of the chemistry department at California State University, Los Angeles in 1968, and in 1971 he spent a year teaching at the University of Nairobi. Ferguson was involved in the founding of the National Organization for Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers in 1972 along with Joseph Cannon, William Jackson, Bill Guillory, Henry McBay, and James Porter. He retired from Cal State in 1986 at the age of sixty-eight. Ferguson talks about his family including his two sons and one daughter, and he concludes by saying that he would like to be

remembered as an active chemist who encouraged minority participation, as well as a good husband and father.

Food and Drug Administration.

Project SEED.

National Organization for Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers.

Retirement.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with Lloyd N. Ferguson, Section A2011\_030\_002\_006, TRT: 6:25:46  
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Lloyd Ferguson recaps some of the events of his life and expands upon certain things. He worked with Melvin Calvin at the University of California, Berkeley. Ferguson conducted research on organic reactions related to taste at Howard University. His contemporaries included Percy Julian, Sam Ashley, and Herman Branson. Ferguson is reminded of starting the Minority Bio-Medical Research Support Program (MBRS) at California State University, Los Angeles. After a brief discussion about textbooks, Ferguson describes his interest in chemistry in high school where he built his own laboratory in his backyard. Ferguson's last thought relates to his year in Africa, and he remembers that the students were happy to see an African American professor.

Scientific research.

Howard University.

African American scientists.

Minorities in science.

Science--Study and teaching--Africa.