

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Patricia Bath

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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>	Bath, Patricia, 1942-2019
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 29, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:03:27).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Physician Dr. Patricia Bath (1942 - 2019) was a professor of ophthalmology at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science and the UCLA School of Medicine in Los Angeles, California. She invented the laserphaco probe, a device used in cataract surgery. Bath was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 29, 2012, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_243
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Medical scientist Patricia E. Bath was born on November 4, 1942 in Harlem, New York. Bath's father, Rupert, was a Trinidadian immigrant and the first black motorman in the New York City subway system. Her mother, Gladys, was a descendant of African slaves and Cherokee Native Americans and worked as a housewife and domestic. Bath attended Julia Ward Howe Junior High School and Charles Evans Hughes High School. In 1959, Bath received a grant from the National Science Foundation to attend the Summer Institute in Biomedical Science at Yeshiva University in New York, where she worked on a project studying the relationship between cancer, nutrition, and stress. Bath went on to graduate from Hunter College in New York City with her B.S. degree in chemistry in 1964. She then attended Howard University Medical School. Bath graduated with honors in 1968 with her M.D. degree and also won the Edwin J. Watson Prize for Outstanding Student in Ophthalmology.

From 1970 until 1973, Bath was the first African American resident in ophthalmology at New York University's School of Medicine. During this time, she married and gave birth to a daughter, Eraka, in 1972. In 1973, Bath worked as an assistant surgeon at Sydenham Hospital, Flower and Fifth Avenue Hospital, and Metropolitan Surgical Hospital, all in New York City. In 1974, she completed a fellowship in corneal and keratoprosthesis surgery. Then, Bath moved to Los Angeles, California where she became the first African American woman surgeon at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Center. She was also appointed assistant professor at the Charles R. Drew University. In 1975, Bath became the first woman faculty member of the UCLA Jules Stein Eye Institute.

In 1981, Bath conceived of her invention, the Laserphaco Probe. She traveled to Berlin University in Germany to learn more about laser technology, and over the course of the next five years, she developed and tested a model for a laser instrument that could be tested to remove cataracts. Bath received a patent for her invention on May 17, 1988, and became the first African American female doctor to receive a patent for a medical invention. She

continued to work at UCLA and Drew University during the development of her laser cataract removal instrument, and, in 1983, she developed and chaired an ophthalmology residency training program. From 1983 to 1986, Bath was the first woman chair and first female program director of a postgraduate training program in the United States. In 1993, Bath retired from the UCLA Medical Center. Bath was inducted into the International Women in Medicine Hall of Fame in 2001.

Patricia E. Bath was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 29, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Patricia Bath was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 29, 2012, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Physician Dr. Patricia Bath (1942 - 2019) was a professor of ophthalmology at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science and the UCLA School of Medicine in Los Angeles, California. She invented the laserphaco probe, a device used in cataract surgery.

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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:

Bath, Patricia, 1942-2019

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Bath, Patricia, 1942-2019 --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:

Physician

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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 Dr. Patricia Bath, November 29, 2012. 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 Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:09 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath was born on November 4, 1942 in New York City to Gladys Elliott Bath and Rupert S.M. Bath. Her paternal great-great-grandfather, Jonas Mohammed Bath, was a sultan of Mandinka heritage from the Western Sudan. He was captured and enslaved in Trinidad, where he later purchased his freedom. Bath's father was born in 1905 in Trinidad, where he studied under Eric Williams, the future prime minister. Upon immigrating to New York City, he became the Interborough Rapid Transit Company's first black operator. He was fired for attempted to form a union, and then became a merchant seaman. Bath's mother had Cherokee and African American ancestry, and was born around 1920 in Milton, North Carolina. There, Bath's maternal grandfather worked as a carriage driver, while her grandmother was a homemaker. In the early 1940s, her mother moved to New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where her great aunt introduced her to Bath's father. After they married, she began working in domestic service.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:13 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath grew up in the Harlem section of New York City. Her father, Rupert S.M. Bath, traveled globally for his career as a merchant seaman, so Bath was primarily reared by her mother, Gladys Elliott Bath. Bath attended a Baptist church with her mother, and often played games with her neighborhood friends, including the bottle cap sport called lodies. Bath began her education at P.S. 68 in Harlem, where she played the lead role in school plays like 'H.M.S. Pinafore.' Bath went on to attend Julia Ward Howe Junior High School 81. Around this time, she became interested in medicine through the influence of her pediatrician, who was a family friend from the Trinidadian community. At this point, Bath remembers her older brother, Rupert Bath, who taught her to read. He graduated from the City College of New York, and went on to work for the New York City Police Department. Bath also had a half-brother, whom she visited in Trinidad as an adult.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:19 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath was a student at Julia Ward Howe Junior High School 81 in New York City at the time of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision in 1954. Bath went on to attend New York City's Charles Evans Hughes High School, where she developed a science fair experiment with bioluminescent bacteria. She was awarded a National Science Foundation fellowship to conduct research at New York City's Yeshiva University during the summer of 1960. Bath also received a merit award from Mademoiselle magazine, and was featured in local publications like The New York Times and the New York Post. After graduating, Bath enrolled at New York City's Hunter College, where she was offered a full scholarship for her academic achievements. She pledged to the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, through which she participated in sit-ins at the F.W. Woolworth Company lunch counter. Bath also talks about the other social organizations at Hunter College, including the Roosevelt House and the Toussaint L'Ouverture Society.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:30 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath received a bachelor's degree in chemistry from New York City's Hunter College in 1964. She then attended the Howard University College of Medicine, where she was mentored by Dr. LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr. and Dr. Lois A. Young, who inspired Bath's interest in ophthalmology. Along with her classmate Jack Moore, Bath founded the school's chapter of the Student National Medical Association. She also participated in Reverend Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign, where she helped establish the medical coordinating committee for Resurrection City. In 1969, Bath interned at Harlem Hospital in New York City. She talks about the significance of the hospital's affiliation with Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Bath served as a resident at the New York University School of Medicine from 1970 to 1973, during which time she gave birth to her daughter, Eraka Bath. Bath also describes the process of obtaining a medical license.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:25 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath completed her medical residency at the New York University School of Medicine in New York City. She then served as an assistant surgeon at New York City's Sydenham Hospital from 1973 to 1974. During this time, she completed a fellowship in prosthetic corneal transplant surgery under the mentorship of eye surgeons Ramon Castroviejo and Hernando Cardona. Bath subsequently joined the faculty of the recently founded Charles R. Drew Postgraduate Medical School in Los Angeles, California. In addition, she became the first woman to serve on the faculty of the Jules Stein Eye Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Medicine. In 1977, Bath founded the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness, which developed the concept of community ophthalmology. She also traveled to Nigeria, where she worked with university teaching hospitals to improve their eye care services. During her sabbatical in 1986, Bath invented the laserphaco probe, a device used in cataract surgery.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:33 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath developed the laserphaco probe, a device used to remove cataracts, in 1986; and obtained her first patent for the invention in 1988. In the following years, technological advancements allowed for the development of new cataract surgery techniques using femtosecond lasers. During this period, Bath became the chief of the ophthalmological residency program at the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science in Los Angeles, California, where she coauthored papers with many of her students. In 1993, Bath decided to retire from academia to focus on her other interests, including the visual arts. She continued her involvement with the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness, which established computer vision programs at schools for the blind in Africa, such as the St. Oda School for the Blind in Siaya County, Kenya. At this point in the interview, Bath reflects upon her accomplishments as well as her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Patricia Bath, Section A2012\_243\_001\_007, TRT: 7:05:18 ?

Dr. Patricia Bath's parents, Gladys Elliott Bath and Rupert S.M. Bath, lived to see her graduate from the Howard University College of Medicine. Years later, Bath's daughter, Eraka Bath, attended the Howard University College of Medicine after earning a bachelor's degree from the University of California, Berkeley. Her daughter went on to serve as the director of forensic child psychiatry in the Department of Psychiatry at the David Geffen School of Medicine in Los Angeles, California. Bath reflects upon her legacy, and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.