

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Matthew George

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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>	George, Matthew, 1949-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 17, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:46:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Biochemist and geneticist Matthew George (1949 - ) served as the senior scientist on the African Burial Ground Project in New York City. George was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 17, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_013
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Biochemist Matthew George was born on February 15, 1949 in Birmingham, Alabama. George was awarded an undergraduate scholarship to attend Wiley College in Marshall, Texas where he received his B.S. degree in chemistry and biology in 1971. George went on to earn his M.S. degree in microbiology and biochemistry in 1974 from Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University). In 1982, George graduated with his Ph.D. degree in biochemistry from the University of California, Berkeley.

From 1981 to 1984, George studied genetics and biochemistry at the San Diego Zoo and the National Cancer Institute in Frederick, Maryland. George's career at Howard University College of Medicine began in 1984 when he became an assistant professor of biochemistry. In 1992, he was promoted to associate professor. George's research focused on the evolution and interactions of mitochondrial DNA as well as cancer metastasis. He was instrumental in the development of the "mitochondrial Eve hypothesis," which attempts to explain the origin of humankind. George studies the molecular structure and behavior of mitochondrial DNA which traced humans back to a common ancestor that lived in Africa about 200,000 years ago. Between 1995 and 1997, George served as senior scientist on the African Burial Ground Project where he traced 200 year old remains back to West African locations by analyzing DNA from bones. Since 2001, George has served as chair of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at Howard University College of Medicine.

George has authored numerous scientific research articles, which have appeared in journals such as the *Journal of Molecular Biological Evolution*. In addition, his research has been funded by prestigious organizations such as the National Institute of Health, the National Cancer Institute and the National Center for Human Genome Research. His research on mitochondrial DNA was featured in the exhibit "Science in American Life," found in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. In addition to his research, George has mentored research students including several dissertation prize winners.

George lives in Silver Spring, Maryland with his wife Yolanda George, who is an education program director at

the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

George Matthew was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 17, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Matthew George was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 17, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Biochemist and geneticist Matthew George (1949 - ) served as the senior scientist on the African Burial Ground Project in New York City.

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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:

George, Matthew, 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

George, Matthew, 1949- --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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Howard University. College of Medicine

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Howard University. College of Medicine

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## Occupations:

Biochemist

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Geneticist

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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 Matthew George, January 17, 2013. 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 Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:38 ?

Matthew George talks about his family background. His mother, Rosetta Johnson, was born in August of 1931 in Dallas County, Alabama. Her mother died when she was young and she was raised by her older sisters in Birmingham, Alabama. George's father, Matthew George, Sr., was born in June of 1925 in Snow Hill, Alabama. He grew up in Pine Apple, Alabama, and was primarily raised by his grandmother because of his mother's neglect due to his darker skin tone. He, like his wife, did not finish elementary school and he later became a steel mill worker at Stockham Valves and Fittings in Birmingham. George is the eldest of his ten siblings, which include three sets of twins. He talks about his likeness to his parents, his parents' relationship, his earliest childhood memories, and his childhood home in the Lovemann Village projects in Titusville, Alabama.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:24 ?

Matthew George grew up in the Loveman's Village projects, which are in a community called Titusville in Birmingham, Alabama. He talks about growing up in the Loveman Village projects, his childhood memories, his upbringing in the church, and how his religious views evolved after attending college. As the eldest of his nine other siblings, George's natural inclination was to act as a role model to them and undertake more responsibility around the house. He also implemented a similar work ethic to his academic life. George attended W.C. Davis Elementary School. George talks about the disciplinary tactics of his elementary school teacher, Annie Mae Mitchell Smith. He also talks about his memories of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the racially motivated bombing incidents, seeing Martin Luther King Jr. speak at his church, and the origin of the term "bama".

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:16 ?

Matthew George talks about his childhood aspirations, his world view during his adolescence, and his influence on his brothers and sisters. He attended Ulman High School in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was inducted into the National Honor Society (NHS) in the eleventh grade. Due to this designation, George, as well as his cohorts that were from the projects, as opposed to those from the more affluent neighborhoods of Honeysuckle Hills and Honeysuckle Circles, were regarded as "little heroes." George served as president of the honor society and student council president during his senior year. He talks about his experience in high school and his experience preparing for his Salutatorian

speech for his high school graduation. George decided to attend Wiley College under the encouragement and guidance of his high school counselor, Ms. Coman. Initially intent upon majoring in political science, George decided to study science after realizing the former was not available.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:03 ?

Matthew George talks about growing up in Alabama during the age of segregation. He worked at grocery stores, such as Winn-Dixie and the Piggly Wiggly, and at Stockham Valves and Fittings during his school years. After graduating in 1967, George attended Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, originally on a four-year scholarship. However, due to fiscal mismanagement, George ended up receiving a 1 year scholarship with three years of work study; he later worked as a teacher's assistant. George was impressed with the intellectual environment at Wiley College. Although he initially aspired to study political science due to his fascination with the Civil Rights Movement, he decided to study biology and chemistry due to their availability and his talent in the subjects. George talks about his experience at Wiley, his professors, his studies, and his professors he met at Atlanta University during the summer of his junior year.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:40 ?

Matthew George studied biology and chemistry at Wiley College. During his junior year, he attended a summer undergraduate research program at Atlanta University, where he met Lafayette Frederick and his soon-to-be wife, Yolanda. After receiving his B.S. degree from Wiley College in 1970, George returned to Atlanta University to pursue his master's degree in microchemistry and biochemistry. While there, he reunited with Yolanda and their relationship progressed, eventually leading to the birth of their first and only child on Christmas Eve of 1972. In 1973, George and his wife were recruited to work in the Biomedical Science Unit at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. After receiving his M.S. degree in 1974, he pursued his doctoral studies in biochemistry at the University of California, Berkeley and worked under the tutelage of Allan Wilson. George talks about defending his master's thesis, his family life during graduate school, and his assessment racism in the North.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_006, TRT: 6:26:02 ?

Matthew George received his Ph.D. degree in biochemistry from the University

of California, Berkeley in 1982. His doctoral advisor was Allan C. Wilson, who was a pioneer in the field of molecular evolutionary biology, human evolution, and genetics. Wilson's work with George and other doctoral students, including Rebecca Cann, led to the discovery of the Mitochondrial Eve, which refers to the most recent woman from whom all living humans are descended from. George's work with Wilson led to the paper that established the rate of change of mitochondrial DNA which can be used to assess divergence among species, titled "Rapid Evolution of Animal Mitochondrial DNA." The paper reinforced his dissertation research, which focused on mitochondrial DNA evolution in old world monkeys. Prior to completing his Ph.D. degree, was awarded a post-doctoral fellowship in genetics and biochemistry at the San Diego Zoo, where he worked in Oliver Ryder's laboratory on mitochondrial evolution in Equus.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_007, TRT: 7:29:55 ?

Matthew George served as a post-doctoral fellow at the National Cancer Institute in Frederick, Maryland from 1983 to 1984. There, he worked with Steve O'Brien and studied leukemia in domestic cats, wild cats, and endangered panda. In 1984, George was appointed to Howard University's College of Medicine, where he taught biochemistry. He talks about one of his students, Daryl Bashum, who was a recipient of the Dissertation of the Year Award and is a biotech patent attorney. George talks about the applications of DNA technology in forensics and genetic testing, as well as the ethics regarding genetic testing. He also talks about his work on the African Burial Project with Michael Blakey, his experience working with his wife, and the challenges of doing research at an HBCU.

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Video Oral History Interview with Matthew George, Section A2013\_013\_001\_008, TRT: 8:22:50 ?

Matthew George reflects on his legacy, his career at Howard University and the decisions he's made there. He talks about his family, his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his experience at the Science and American Life exhibit at the American History Museum, and how he would like to be remembered. Finally, he describes his photos.

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