

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Edmund B. Gaither

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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>	Gaither, Edmund B.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 12, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:10:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Curator Edmund B. Gaither (1944 - ) was the founder of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Roxbury, Massachusetts. In 1969, Gaither became a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and also taught at Spellman College, Wellesley College, Harvard University, and Boston University. Gaither was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 12, 2001, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_086
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Edmund Barry Gaither was born in Great Falls, South Carolina, on October 6, 1944. Growing up in a small town, Gaither had a devout interest in the arts, but no access to museums. Attending Morehouse College proved to be very influential to his growth as a person, as it was the first time that Gaither had the opportunity to live with and appreciate paintings and sculptures first-hand. Additionally, all of his formal understanding and training in the visual arts and art history began there. Gaither graduated from Morehouse with a B.A. degree and went on to obtain a M.F.A. from Brown University in 1968.

Since 1969, Gaither has been a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He is also the founder and curator of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Using the Museum of Fine Arts as his base, he has developed the National Center's permanent collection and organized many exhibitions. His work has established the National Center as a vital cultural presence for African American art in Boston and the nation.

Gaither has taught at Spellman College, Wellesley College, Harvard University, and Boston University, as well as serving as panel chairman for the National Endowment for the Arts and on President George W. Bush's Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Edmund B. Gaither was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on February 12, 2001, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Curator Edmund B. Gaither (1944 - ) was the founder of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Roxbury, Massachusetts. In

1969, Gaither became a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and also taught at Spellman College, Wellesley College, Harvard University, and Boston University.

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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:

Gaither, Edmund B.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gaither, Edmund B.--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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Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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## Occupations:

Curator

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Edmund B. Gaither, February 12, 2001. 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 Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Edmund Gaither talks about his father's family origins in Great Falls, South Carolina and admits that his father experienced a better education than he. He then shares a story about his father helping build the local AME church in the community and his pride in having such a role model. Gaither then discusses his racial origins and the fact that there is a white component to his family from Maryland to whom his family may be related. Lastly, Gaither talks about the attitudes among blacks and whites in Great Falls, and shares stories about moments of intolerance as well as acceptance.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_002, TRT:  
0:30:13 ?

Edmund Gaither talks about his mother's origins from Starr, South Carolina. He then discusses his ancestors' strong attitudes about education and the women choosing teaching as their careers. Gaither then shares a story about his youngest sister, and talks extensively about the patterns of naming of children in the South. Edmund Gaither then describes his personality as a young boy, his lively imagination and his penchant for art rather than sports. Lastly, Gaither recalls his formal schooling and shares stories of how his mischievousness got him into trouble.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_003, TRT:  
0:29:36 ?

Edmund Gaither details the education system where he grew up, in Great Falls, South Carolina in the 1950s. Gaither then talks about his educational experiences and his penchant for oratory. He then shares a story about traveling to Janesville, Wisconsin while in high school and boarding with a white family. Edmund Gaither talks about the educational obstacles he had to conquer while attending a segregated school, yet discusses with pride the supplemental lessons in black history he received. Gaither then details the systematic disenfranchisement of his parents and others who were denied teaching jobs if they were reported to be racially subversive. Lastly, Gaither talks about his father's union-organizing activities and the unethical business practices of the J. P. Stevens Company, the local textile mill.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_004, TRT:  
0:30:13 ?

Edmund Gaither talks about his parents' nurturing qualities and details his family members' musical abilities. He then discusses his vast collection of congregational music and his observations on its uniqueness. Gaither then returns to talking about his experiences while traveling to Janesville, Wisconsin for his local student government. Edmund Gaither details how he arrived at the decision to attend Morehouse College in the 1960s. Lastly, Gaither details his experiences at Morehouse and extols the virtues of the people and educational advantages there.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_005, TRT:  
0:30:09 ?

Edmund Gaither recalls his first real exposure to the fine arts during his college years at Morehouse College in Atlanta. He talks at length about the other colleges he visited nearby, and the African American artists' works that are represented there. Gaither then talks about his post-collegiate transition out of the South and into Boston, and details the politics of the museum scene there and his professional relationship with Elma Lewis, founder of the National Center of Afro-American Artists. Lastly, Gaither talks about the African American art exhibition that set the groundwork for his future career path.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_006, TRT:  
0:29:01 ?

Edmund Gaither talks about the establishment of the National Center of Afro-American Artists and the difficulties he experienced with finding the building that exists as their current site. Gaither then discusses the professional organizations for African American museums in which he is an active participant. He then details his career successes and the assistance the National Center receives from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Lastly, Gaither explains the National Center's dependency on other local institutions for support.

Video Oral History Interview with Edmund B. Gaither, Section A2001\_086\_001\_007, TRT:  
0:10:28 ?

Edmund Gaither discusses the future of the black museums in relation to the overall African American community. He then gives his views on African Americans and the need for them to support black-run institutions. Lastly, Gaither reflects on his legacy in relation to his years and dedication to his museum work.