

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geoffrey Holder

PERSON

Holder, Geoffrey, 1930-

**Alternative Names:** Geoffrey Holder;

**Life Dates:** August 20, 1930-October 5, 2014

**Place of Birth:** Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago

**Residence:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Dancer; Painter

## Biographical Note

Artist, dancer, and choreographer, Geoffrey Holder, was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, on August 20, 1930. While in Port-of-Spain, Holder attended Queens Royal College, but received much of his education in dancing and painting from the Holder Dance Company, his older brother Boscoe's dance troupe.

Holder premiered in his brother's dance company at the age of seven, and by 1947, he was in charge of the troupe. After being seen by dancer Agnes de Mille in 1952, Holder was invited to New York to audition; to finance the trip for himself and his troupe, he sold twenty of his paintings. After failing to receive a sponsorship to tour and perform, Holder began teaching at the Katherine Dunham School of Cultural Arts. In 1954, Holder made his first Broadway performance as Samedi in *House of Flowers*. For the next two years, Holder appeared as a principal dancer on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet and continued to work with his own troupe through 1960. Holder also continued to paint, and in 1957 was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship; that same year brought his first film role, *All Night Long*, a modern retelling of *Othello*. Roles continued to come in, with Holder playing Baron Samedi in the James Bond film *Live and Let Die* and *Punjab in Annie*. In more recent years, Holder appeared in the Eddie Murphy film *Boomerang*.

Not limited to his acting and painting, Holder also directed; his production of *The Wiz*, an all-black retelling of *The Wizard of Oz*, earned him Tony Awards for best director and best costume design. Holder also wrote *Black Gods, Green Islands*, an illustrated collection of Caribbean folklore, and *Geoffrey Holder's Caribbean Cookbook*. Holder and his wife, dancer Carmen DeLavallade, met and married while Holder was performing in *House of Flowers* in 1955; the couple lived and worked in New York City.

Holder passed away on October 5, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Holder Dance Company** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1997 to 2006]

**Dancer**

**Katherine Dunham School of Dance and Theatre** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Instructor**

**Metropolitan Opera Ballet** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1983 to 1985]

**Principal Dancer**