

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thomas Battle

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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>	Battle, Thomas C.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 9, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:43:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Archivist, cultural heritage chief executive, and historian Thomas Battle (1946 - ) was the director of Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection, the largest black owned archive of black history and culture in the world. Battle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 9, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_058
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Librarian, artist, curator, and historian Thomas Cornell Battle was born on March 19, 1946, at Howard University's Freedman's Hospital in Washington, D.C., to Thomas Oscar Battle and Lenore Thomas Battle. Battle attended Colonel Charles Young Elementary School, Bishop Henry McNeil Turner Elementary School, River Terrace Elementary School and Carter G. Woodson Junior High School. Battle graduated from William McKinley High School in 1964 while working at Mt. Pleasant Public Library. At Howard University, Battle was mentored by Loraine Williams and Rayford W. Logan and was influenced by Stokeley Carmichael, James Nabrit, Leon Damas, and Nathan Hare, among others. Battle was awarded his B.A. degree in history in 1968; he earned his M.L.S. degree from the University of Maryland College of Information Studies in 1971, and his Ph.D. degree in American studies from George Washington University in 1983. Battle's dissertation was a bibliographical study of slavery in the District of Columbia.

In 1972, advised by Oswald Person, Battle applied for and was hired as a reference librarian by Howard's Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection, then under distinguished director, Dorothy Porter. During this period, Battle was granted a fellowship through the Black Caucus of the American Library Association to study in Sierra Leone for a year. Michael Winston was director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection as Battle became founding curator of the manuscript division in 1974; later, Battle became university archivist. In 1986, Battle was named director of Howard's Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection, the largest black owned archive of black history and culture in the world.

Committed to illuminating the lives of pioneer bibliophiles like Arthur Schomburg, Alexander Cromwell, and Jesse Moorland, Battle, with Paul Coates and Eleanor Des Virney Sinnette, authored *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History* in 1983. The realization of Howard's unique place in world history prompted the book, *Howard in Retrospect: Images of the Capstone* co-authored with Clifford L. Muse, Jr. in 1995. Battle co-edited with Donna M. Wells on the 2007 work, *Legacy: Treasures of Black History*, which features more

than 150 historic items including documents, letters, images, artifacts and articles by twelve scholars including: Joseph E. Harris, Greg Carr, James Turner and Deborah Willis.

Battle taught history at Howard University, the University of Maryland, and Amherst College. In 2006, the University of Maryland College of Information Studies (CLIS) presented Battle with the James Partridge Award.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Thomas Battle was conducted by Janet Sims-Wood on February 9, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Archivist, cultural heritage chief executive, and historian Thomas Battle (1946 - ) was the director of Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Collection, the largest black owned archive of black history and culture in the world.

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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:

Battle, Thomas C.

Sims-Wood, Janet (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Battle, Thomas C.--Interviews

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African American educators--Interviews

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African American historians--Interviews

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African American scholars--Interviews

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Archivists--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:

Archivist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Thomas Battle, February 9, 2007. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:25 ?

Thomas Battle was born on March 19, 1946 in Washington, D.C. to Lenora Thomas Battle and Thomas O. Battle, both of whom were born in Nash County, North Carolina. Battle was the oldest of their eight children. He was close to his paternal grandmother, and visited his relatives' tobacco farms during the summers. In Washington, D.C., Battle began his education at Charles Young Elementary School, and went on to attend Carter G. Woodson Junior High School, and then McKinley Technical High School, where he was influenced by his journalism teacher. A hardworking student, Battle read books like 'The Mis-Education Of the Negro' by Carter G. Woodson at an early age. He was also on the track team, worked for the District of Columbia Public Library and wrote sports articles for the Washington Daily News. Upon graduating in 1964, Battle enrolled at Howard University, and earned a degree in political science in 1969. He remembers Washington, D.C.'s open-air markets, like the Florida Avenue Market and Eastern Market.

African American educators--Interviews.

African American historians--Interviews.

African American scholars--Interviews.

Archivists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

Thomas Battle excelled in school despite the segregated schools and tracking system in Washington, D.C. Battle's teachers and parents emphasized the importance of education. His father, Thomas O. Battle, worked for the government of Washington, D.C., and drove a taxi; while his mother, Lenora Thomas Battle was a homemaker. While a student at McKinley Technical High School, Battle worked at the Mt. Pleasant Neighborhood Library, where he met educator Oswell Person, who became his mentor. Upon graduating from Howard University, Battle considered pursuing a career in law or the U.S. military, but was recruited to work in the library media center at Federal City College in Washington, D.C. With Person's guidance, Battle obtained a fellowship to pursue library training at the University of Maryland, College Park. He remembers civil rights activists Julius Hobson and Douglas E. Moore; as well as his college mentors, professors Russell Adams and Nathan Hare, and classmate Stokely Carmichael.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Thomas Battle served as a marshal at the March on Washington in 1963. He was also involved in the D.C. Federation of Civic Associations, and read the Washington Afro-American newspaper. Battle frequented the Drum and Spear Bookstore in Washington, D.C., and learned about the Nation of Islam at the local mosque. Later, he enrolled in the graduate library studies program at the University of Maryland in College Park. Battle considered studying urban librarianship, but chose a more traditional program to accommodate his broad academic interests. At the University of Maryland, he became involved with the black undergraduate organizations. He recalls the temporary closure of the

campus due to protests against the invasion of Cambodia, which angered the black students, who were deprived of their education. Battle talks about President Lyndon Baines Johnson's election, and the administration of President Richard Nixon. He also remembers Howard University professors Frantz Fanon and Chancellor Williams.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Thomas Battle earned a master's degree in library science from the University of Maryland in College Park in 1971, and began his career at the District of Columbia Public Library in Washington, D.C. With the encouragement of his mentor, Oswald Person, Battle obtained a position as a reference librarian at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center in 1972. He was initially impressed by the breadth of the collection. Later that year, he travelled with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association to Sierra Leone, where he worked with the Sierra Leone Library Board in Freetown, and encountered colonialist British literature. In the 1970s, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center received bomb threats from student activists; but, after the center's first director, Dorothy Porter Wesley, educated them about the significance of the collection, they became its biggest supporters. Battle remembers the center's patrons, like historians Rayford Logan, John Hope Franklin and Benjamin A. Quarles.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:51 ?

Thomas Battle worked as a librarian at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, which was established as the Moorland Foundation, A Library of Negro Life in 1914. The institution became a research library in 1933, and purchased NAACP leader Arthur Spingarn's collection in 1946. Battle also served as an exchange librarian at the Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. There, he met Gloria Dillsworth, who was the senior librarian at the Sierra Leone Library Board. Upon Battle's return to the United States in 1973, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center's founding director, Dorothy Porter Wesley, retired, and a new research center was created with Michael R. Winston as the director. In 1974, Battle was named the founding curator of the manuscript division, and developed the center's university archives with the assistance of black archivist Harold T. Pinkett. Battle began his doctoral studies at George Washington University. He also describes the incidents of theft from the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Thomas Battle earned a Ph.D. degree in American studies from George Washington University, where historian Letitia W. Brown was his advisor. For his dissertation, Battle planned to study the political philosophy of Benjamin Mays, but decided to develop a research guide on black history in Washington, D.C. instead. He was met with apprehension by his committee, who thought he would not have enough materials; but completed the annotated bibliography using books, journals, newspapers and research collections. His findings were published by The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. At the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Director Michael R. Winston focused on acquiring unique collections, while Battle published 'Black Bibliophiles and Collectors' with his colleagues, Elinor Des Verney Sinnette and W. Paul Coates. Battle also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland in College Park and American University in Washington, D.C. He talks about private collectors like librarian Mayme Clayton.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_007, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Thomas Battle and Donna M. Wells published 'Legacy: Treasures of Black History,' which featured materials from the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

in Washington, D.C. In 1986, Battle was named the institution's director. He describes his plans for the center, as well as one of his favorite pieces in the collection, which was a print by Richard Ansdell called 'The Hunted Slaves.' Battle was involved in professional organizations like the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the National Conference of African American Librarians, the Society of American Archivists and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, which was founded by historian Carter G. Woodson. He talks about the growing interest in collecting African and African American artifacts for profit, and the lack of knowledge about African American historical collections like the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Thomas Battle, Section A2007\_058\_001\_008, TRT: 0:17:52 ?

Thomas Battle reflects upon his life, legacy, family and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.