

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Judy Richardson

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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>	Richardson, Judy, 1944-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 9, 2007 and October 4, 2022
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2022
<b>Physical Description:</b>	23 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (11:49:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist and film producer Judy Richardson (1944 - ) was a co-founder of Drum and Spear Bookstore in Washington, D.C., and worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on a variety of civil rights issues. Richardson also worked with Blackside Productions and Northern Light Productions on a variety of films and shows, most famously the Eyes on the Prize series, in addition to having a prolific career as a writer and public speaker. Richardson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 9, 2007 and October 4, 2022, in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_129
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Film producer and former Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist Judy Richardson was born to autoworker William King Richardson and state office worker Mae Louise Tucker Richardson in Tarrytown, New York. Richardson grew up in the “under the hill” section of Tarrytown; the town was in the legendary “Sleepy Hollow country” made famous by author Washington Irving. Richardson’s father helped organize the United Auto Workers (UAW) local at the Chevrolet plant in Tarrytown and died “on the line” when she was seven years old. Richardson graduated from Sleepy Hollow High School in 1962 and was accepted to Swarthmore College on a full, four-year scholarship. Later, Richardson would also attend Columbia University, Howard University, and Antioch College.

During her freshman year at Swarthmore, Richardson joined the Swarthmore Political Action Committee (SPAC), a Students for a Democratic Society affiliate. In 1963, Richardson traveled by bus on weekends, with other SPAC volunteers, to assist the Cambridge, Maryland, community in desegregating public accommodations. The Cambridge Movement was led by civil rights activist Gloria Richardson, with assistance from SNCC field secretaries such as Baltimore native Reggie Robinson. Richardson eventually joined the SNCC staff at the national office in Atlanta, where she worked closely with, among others, James Forman, Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, and Julian Bond. When the national office moved to Mississippi, during 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer, Richardson relocated as well. Richardson also worked in SNCC’s projects in Lowndes County, Alabama (with Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Ture and others) and in Southwest Georgia. In 1965, Richardson became office manager for Julian Bond’s successful first campaign for the Georgia House of Representatives; she also organized a northern Freedom School to bring together young activists from SNCC’s Southern projects and Northern support offices.

In 1968, Richardson and other former SNCC staffers founded Drum and Spear Bookstore in Washington, D.C., which became the largest black bookstore in the country. Richardson was also the children's editor of Drum and Spear Press. In 1970, Richardson wrote an essay on racism in black children's books, published by Howard University's *Journal of Negro Education*. In 1978, Richardson began working with Henry Hampton and Blackside Productions on an early version of what would become the *Eyes On The Prize* series; major production for this Academy Award-nominated, six-hour PBS series began in 1986, during which time she acted as researcher and content advisor. For *Eyes On The Prize II*, the subsequent eight-hour series, Richardson was the series associate producer. Beginning in 1982, Richardson was director of information for the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, participating in its protests against police brutality in New York City, and its bus caravans to the Alabama Black Belt to counter the Reagan Administration's intimidation of elderly African American voters. Richardson later co-produced Blackside's 1994 Emmy and Peabody Award-winning documentary, *Malcolm X: Make It Plain* (for PBS's *The American Experience*).

Serving as a senior producer for Northern Light Productions in Boston, Richardson produced historical documentaries for broadcast and museums, with a focus on African American historical events, including: a one-hour documentary on the 1968 Orangeburg Massacre (South Carolina) for PBS; two History Channel documentaries on slavery and slave resistance; and installations for, among others, the National Park Service's Little Rock Nine Visitor's Center, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (Cincinnati), the New York State Historical Society's "Slavery in New York" exhibit, and the Paul Laurence Dunbar House (Dayton). Richardson and five other SNCC women, edited *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts By Women in SNCC*. The anthology, published by University of Illinois Press, includes the courageous stories of over fifty SNCC women. It was the Press' best-selling title in 2011 and was issued in paperback in August 2012. Richardson received an Image Award for Vision and Excellence from Women in Film and Video. She lectures, writes, and conducts professional development workshops for teachers about the history and values of the Civil Rights Movement and their relevance to current issues. Richardson was awarded an honorary doctorate by Swarthmore College and became a visiting professor at Brown University in the fall of 2012.

Judy Richardson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 9, 2007, October 4, 2022, and October 6, 2022.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Judy Richardson was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on April 9, 2007 and October 4, 2022, in Cambridge, Massachusetts and Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 23 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights activist and film producer Judy Richardson (1944 - ) was a co-founder of Drum and Spear Bookstore in Washington, D.C., and worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on a variety of civil rights issues. Richardson also worked with Blackside Productions and Northern Light Productions on a variety of films and shows, most famously the *Eyes on the Prize* series, in addition to having a prolific career as a writer and public speaker.

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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®.

## 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:

Richardson, Judy, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Richardson, Judy, 1944- --Interviews

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African American television producers and directors--Interviews

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African American women civil rights workers--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:

Film Producer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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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 Judy Richardson, April 9, 2007 and October 4, 2022. 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 Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Judy Richardson was born on March 10, 1944 in Tarrytown, New York to Mae Tucker Richardson and William Richardson. Her maternal grandfather was adopted by Quakers from Pennsylvania; and later moved to New York to work as a cook aboard ships on the Hudson River. Richardson's maternal grandmother originated in Jamaica, where she worked for the manufacturers of Dewar's scotch. She later immigrated to the Bronx, New York, where Richardson's mother was born in 1902. Richardson's maternal uncle was one of New York City's first black CPAs, and her maternal aunt, Helen Tucker Aldridge, attended Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Her mother worked as a seamstress and a jazz pianist. Richardson's father was born in Tarrytown, New York and raised by his grandmother, Carrie Richardson, who claimed him as her son. Richardson later learned that the man she considered her uncle, John Richardson, was her father's father. Richardson's parents met married in the 1920s. Richardson also narrates her photographs.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

African American women civil rights workers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:17 ?

Judy Richardson's father, William Richardson, grew up in Tarrytown, New

York. He worked at the Fisher Body Corporation's automobile plant, where he founded a local chapter of the United Automobile Workers union. Richardson grew up with her parents and her older sister, Carita Richardson, in a poor neighborhood in Tarrytown, where they were the only black family. She recalls her friendship with her white neighbor, whose parents did not allow Richardson in their home because of her race. She also recalls taking the train to New York City for violin lessons. Richardson began her schooling at Frank R. Pierson School in Tarrytown, where her classes took annual field trips to Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Her father died of a heart attack when she was in elementary school, so her mother went back to work full time. Richardson often watched TV shows such as 'The Howdy Doody Show' and 'The Milton Berle Show,' and her mother's favorite news programs, 'The Huntley-Brinkley Report' and 'Meet the Press.'

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Judy Richardson attended Sleepy Hollow High School in Sleepy Hollow, New York. She was the first chair violinist in her high school orchestra, and qualified for the Westchester Youth Symphony. Richardson enjoyed reading 'A Farewell to Arms' by Ernest Hemingway, but her mother disapproved of the sexual references in his novels. She had several black role models in Tarrytown, including Mary Lane Cobb, a doctor at Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Richardson also recalls racial prejudice in town, such as discriminatory housing practices and her high school's defamatory depiction of African Americans during the Reconstruction era. As a teenager, she wrote a letter to the Tarrytown Daily News opposing school integration. Graduating in 1962, Richardson received a full scholarship to Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. There, she became active in Students for a Democratic Society and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and attended the March on Washington in 1963.

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Judy Richardson enrolled at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania in 1962. She joined its chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which protested segregated businesses in Cambridge, Maryland. Richardson became the first African American to be elected to Swarthmore's May Day court. On the advice of classmate Penny Patch, Richardson took a leave from college in 1963 to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Her mother and sister initially opposed her decision, but eventually offered their support. Richardson began working with Reggie Robinson in Cambridge. Later, she visited SNCC's national office in Atlanta, Georgia, where James Forman hired her as his secretary. Richardson's duties included communicating with the law firm of Rabinowitz, Boudin and Standard, and coordinating with field secretaries. At SNCC, she worked with Julian Bond, James Lawson, Stokely Carmichael and others. Richardson also recalls SNCC's decision to remain independent of the SCLC.

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Judy Richardson recalls the female leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), including Ella Baker, who acted as a mentor for the organization; and Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, SNCC's administrative secretary. Richardson and others in SNCC respected Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but preferred a more inclusive organizing style. The assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963 elicited mixed reactions amongst the leaders of SNCC, who disagreed over the effectiveness of Kennedy's leadership in matters concerning the Civil Rights Movement. During

the winter of 1964, SNCC launched the Mississippi Freedom Summer voter registration drive; and, later that year, activists like Fannie Lou Hamer and Robert Parris Moses founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which was formed as an alternate delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Richardson, Smith-Robinson, Roberta Yancy and others held a sit-in in James Forman's office to protest sexism within SNCC.

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_001\_006, TRT: 0:17:10 ?

Judy Richardson worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964. She conducted orientation for field volunteers at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Robert Parris Moses informed Richardson and the volunteers of the disappearances of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in Mississippi, and she began to worry about the safety of other activists like Stokely Carmichael and Reggie Robinson. She later relocated to SNCC's Greenwood, Mississippi office. As Richardson and June E. Johnson escorted an injured volunteer, Silas McGhee, from a local hospital, the site was attacked by a mob of white men. Along with her sister, Carita Richardson, she organized a SNCC fundraiser in Mississippi featuring Harry Belafonte, but Belafonte was late for his flight and the Idlewild Airport in New York refused to hold the plane. Despite SNCC's lobbying, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was not seated at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_007, TRT: 7:35:09 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_008, TRT: 8:31:34 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_009, TRT: 9:30:02 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_010, TRT: 10:30:23 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_011, TRT: 11:30:03 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_012, TRT: 12:32:25 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_013, TRT: 13:28:34 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_014, TRT: 14:29:57 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_015, TRT: 15:29:27 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_016, TRT: 16:29:46 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_017, TRT: 17:29:45 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_018, TRT: 18:35:43 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_019, TRT: 19:34:12 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_020, TRT: 20:30:21 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_021, TRT: 21:34:03

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Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_022, TRT: 22:35:10

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Video Oral History Interview with Judy Richardson, Section A2007\_129\_002\_023, TRT: 23:36:22

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