



LeRoy Winbush

**Founding Director and Director Emeritus
Our World – Underwater Scholarship Society®
(designed Society's logo)**

December 7, 1915 – May 4, 2007

LeRoy Winbush was born in Memphis, Tennessee. At the age of five, LeRoy moved with his father to Detroit, Michigan after his parents separated. He moved to Chicago at age fourteen and attended Englewood High School.

LeRoy performed with a singing trio called the *Melody Mixers* which gained attention with performances at clubs, hotels, and on CBS and NBC radio stations. After graduating from high school in 1936, LeRoy worked at a sign shop as an apprentice. The [Regal Theater](#) hired him in 1938 to design and paint the theater front. He subsequently designed signs and displays as the only African American employee at [Goldblatt's Department Store](#) and eventually became their art director. In the 1940s, LeRoy revolutionized the window displays of banks and earned a reputation as one of the country's top airbrush artists. He also worked as art director at [Johnson Publishing Company](#) for a decade, where he helped to create the first issue of [Ebony](#). LeRoy Winbush established a long-term sickle-cell anemia exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry.

After a solid career as a pioneering graphic designer, LeRoy tackled a new challenge at the age of forty-eight learning how to swim at Chicago's Lawson YMCA. He enjoyed it so much that he became a certified scuba diver and qualified for Lawson's 20 Fathom Club in 1966. He served as the club's president from 1968 to 1983. LeRoy led underwater expeditions throughout the world, including the Red Sea, Dutch West Indies, and Jamaica.

LeRoy combined his love for diving and designing as an underwater photographer and created oceanic exhibits in Disney's Epcot Center as well as Hong Kong's Ocean Park Museum. He began ice diving in 1973.

Winbush held many prestigious positions. He was the director of design for the Illinois Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1967 and was an accomplished bowler and skier. He was a design consultant for the [DuSable Museum of African American History](#) from 1992. Without having attended college or art school, LeRoy Winbush became an assistant professor in visual communications at the [School of the Art Institute of Chicago](#).

LeRoy served as vice president of the Our World-Underwater dive show in Chicago for seventeen years. He was a founding director and director emeritus of the Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society® and designed the original logo which is still in current use.

“LeRoy Winbush had no formal training to be a graphic designer, yet there is no denying that he is considered one of the greats. In a field predominately dominated by White males, Winbush was a pioneer who opened the door for countless young designers of color.” *From online description for the book: Design for Life-The Life and Career of Pioneer Designer LeRoy Winbush*

References

[Creative Titans: Leroy Winbush, Breaking Racial Barriers](#) - Taylor Getler

[LeRoy Winbush Obituary](#), Chicago Times, May 9, 2007

[LeRoy Winbush](#), The History Makers, May 29, 2002 interview

[Leroy Winbush, 2008 AIGA Medal](#), AIGA The Professional Association for Design