

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James H. Gilliam, Sr.

---

## 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>	Gilliam, James H., 1920-2015
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 19, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:12:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Social worker James H. Gilliam, Sr. (1920 - 2015 ) founded the Metro-Wilmington Urban League and the Greater Wilmington Housing Corporation. He retired in 1990 as director of New Castle County, Delaware's Department of Community Development and Housing. Gilliam was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 19, 2005, in Wilmington, Delaware. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_265
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Director of New Castle County, Delaware's Department of Community Development and Housing, James H. Gilliam, Sr., was born on August 6, 1920, in Baltimore, Maryland. After receiving his diploma in 1938 from Frederick Douglass High School, he attended and graduated from Morgan State University with his B.A. degree in sociology in 1948, and also earned his M.S.W. degree from Howard University's School of Social Work in 1950. He was a captain in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and won a Bronze Star for his admirable service.

From 1974 to 1990, Gilliam served as president and chairman of the board of Delaware's Community Housing Incorporated and as a consultant on a wide range of community development issues. He was the founder and the first executive director of the Greater Wilmington Housing Corporation. He retired in 1990 as director of New Castle County's Department of Community Development and Housing.

Gilliam also served as spokesperson for the Delaware Cancer Society. He was a member of the Delaware Advisory Committee for the U.S. Commission of Civil Rights, the Judicial Evaluation Committee for the Family Court of Delaware, the Supreme Court of Delaware's Professional Responsibility Committee, and the Magistrate's Steering Committee. He assisted the chief judge of the Family Court in converting the Court into a single statewide operation.

Gilliam's other civic duties included a two-term presidency of the National Association of Non-Profit Housing Organizations; service as a trustee of the National Urban League and Wesley College; and as a director of the National Tuberculosis Association. He was the founder of the Metro-Wilmington Urban League. Gilliam was also a member of the board of governors of the United Way of Delaware and served on the board of the Medical Center of Delaware. Currently, he serves as chairman of New Castle County, Delaware's Diversity Commission.

The Liberty Bell Award was presented to Gilliam in 1997 in recognition of his service as a non-lawyer in

strengthening the American system of freedom under the law. He was named Distinguished Delawarean in 1982, and awarded the Order of the First State that same year. Gilliam won the J. Caleb Boggs Community Service Award in 1990 and was awarded the Josiah Marvel Cup in 1994. The National Conference honored him for Community and Justice in 1999. He is also the recipient of honorary doctorate degrees from Goldey-Beacom College, the University of Delaware, and Delaware State University.

Gilliam passed away on September 10, 2015.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr. was conducted by Shawn Wilson on December 19, 2005, in Wilmington, Delaware, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Social worker James H. Gilliam, Sr. (1920 - 2015 ) founded the Metro-Wilmington Urban League and the Greater Wilmington Housing Corporation. He retired in 1990 as director of New Castle County, Delaware's Department of Community Development and Housing.

---

## 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.

---

## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Gilliam, James H., 1920-2015

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Gilliam, James H., 1920-2015 --Interviews

---

African American civic leaders--Delaware--Wilmington--Interviews

---

African American social workers--Delaware--Wilmington--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Nonprofit Executive

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

---

## 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 James H. Gilliam, Sr., December 19, 2005. 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).

---

## 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 James H. Gilliam, Sr., Section A2005\_265\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

James H. Gilliam, Sr. was born on August 6, 1920 in Baltimore, Maryland to Pocahontas Lipscomb Gilliam and James E. Gilliam. His maternal ancestry contains seventeenth-century immigrants from England, some of whom held slaves, and a branch of the family that renamed themselves Lipscombe. His maternal grandfather, Jacob Lipscomb, was a farmer of black and Native American ancestry. Gilliam's mother was born in Jetersville, Virginia. She was a domestic servant for wealthy families, including one involved with Mary Potter Academy in Oxford, North Carolina. Gilliam's father was born in Blackstone, Virginia, and moved north to work for Bethlehem Steel. Gilliam's parents divorced during his childhood due to his father's womanizing. Gilliam's mother was invested in self-improvement, dressed formally and refined her speaking skills. She purchased property in an all-black neighborhood in northwest Baltimore. Gilliam recalls ending his juvenile delinquency after a judge criticized Gilliam's mother for his behavior.

African American civic leaders--Delaware--Wilmington--Interviews.

African American social workers--Delaware--Wilmington--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr., Section A2005\_265\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

James H. Gilliam, Sr. grew up in northwestern Baltimore, Maryland, where his neighbors included HistoryMaker Anne Brown and Dr. George Huntington Williams. He recalls playing step ball with friends and his mother, Pocahontas Lipscomb Gilliam, bringing Christmas dinner from families where she worked as a domestic. Gilliam's mother was involved in Prophet Costoni's boycott of the Tommy Tuckers dime store in Baltimore for hiring discrimination during the 1930s. Gilliam entered Henry Highland Garnet School, and progressed to Booker T. Washington Junior High School and then Frederick Douglass High School, where he was mentored by highly educated African Americans like his principal and Yolande Du Bois Williams. Gilliam enrolled at Morgan State College, but left at the start of World War II. He became a janitor at Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance in Baltimore, and was promoted to machine operator. After Gilliam was denied a promotion to machine repairman, he quit and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr., Section A2005\_265\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

James H. Gilliam, Sr. enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was sent to Fort George G. Meade in Maryland. After scoring well on an IQ test, he was admitted to a new training program for black technicians with the United States Army Air Corps, sent to Jefferson Barracks Military Post in Missouri, and promoted to staff sergeant. Gilliam left the program after the Army discovered he was colorblind, and entered Officer Candidate School in Fort Benning, Georgia. There, he befriended fellow black candidates James Leonard and Delmar Mitchell. After qualifying, Gilliam was stationed with the 92nd Infantry Division in Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He left the Army in 1946, and returned to Morgan State College. Gilliam was hired by the Maryland Tuberculosis Association, where he met Dr. George Canby Robinson, who secured him a place in graduate school at

Howard University. Gilliam graduated in 1952, and became a community relations advisor for the Housing Authority of Baltimore City. He moved to Wilmington, Delaware in 1964.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr., Section A2005\_265\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:46 ?

James H. Gilliam, Sr. married Louise Hayley Gilliam in 1944, and they had two children, James H. Gilliam, Jr. and Patrice Gilliam-Johnson. After serving in the Korean War, he worked for the Maryland Tuberculosis Association and then the Baltimore Urban Renewal and Housing Agency, where he advocated for increased housing opportunities for disadvantaged minorities. Gilliam moved to Wilmington, Delaware, and later became head of the department of community development and housing in New Castle County, Delaware. He reflects on housing discrimination issues facing African Americans, such as re-segregation and mortgage policies. In 1990, Gilliam helped found the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League. Morgan State University named a new performing arts hall the James H. and Louise Hayley Gilliam Concert Hall in his and his wife's honor in 2001. Gilliam describes his hopes for the African American community and his reputation in Delaware. He also reflects upon his family, life, and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with James H. Gilliam, Sr., Section A2005\_265\_001\_005, TRT: 0:11:56 ?

James H. Gilliam, Sr. narrates his photographs.