

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Charles Whitten

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Whitten, Charles F.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Charles Whitten,
Dates:	March 8, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:25:59).
Abstract:	Pediatrician Dr. Charles Whitten (1922 - 2008) was an expert on sickle cell anemia. Whitten was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 8, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_079
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pediatrician and sickle cell anemia expert Dr. Charles Francis Whitten was born on February 2, 1922 in Wilmington, Delaware to school teachers Emma Clorinda Carr Whitten and Tobias Emmanuel Whitten. He grew up on Wilmington's East Side next door to future jazz trumpeter Clifford Brown. Whitten attended Number 5 Elementary School and graduated fourth in his class from Howard High School in 1940. In 1942, he earned his B.S. degree in zoology from the University of Pennsylvania. Whitten then studied medicine at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee and earned his M.D. degree in 1945 at age twenty-three.

After his internship at Harlem Hospital, Whitten worked as a general practitioner in Lackawanna, New York from 1946 to 1951. Whitten then served two years as a captain in the United States Medical Corps before returning to the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Medicine for a year of advanced study in pediatrics. In 1953, Whitten began a two-year residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital in Buffalo, New York. In 1955, he moved to Detroit, Michigan for a one year fellowship to study pediatric hematology under Dr. Wolf Zeltzer. Whitten became the first and only African American to head a department in a Detroit hospital when he was selected clinical director of pediatrics at Detroit Receiving Hospital in 1956. Whitten worked as an attending pediatrician at Children's Hospital of Michigan from 1962 to 1999. He started teaching medicine as an instructor in pediatrics at Wayne State University in 1956. Whitten was named assistant professor in 1959, served as full professor of pediatrics from 1970 to 1990, and became associate dean of curricular affairs in 1976 and of special programs in 1992.

Whitten joined Dr. Charles Wright in establishing the African Medical Education Fund in 1960. In 1969, Whitten instituted Wayne State University's Post Baccalaureate Enrichment Program to better prepare black students for medical school. In 1971, Whitten with Dorothy Boswell spearheaded the National Association for Sickle Cell Disease, now the Sickle Cell Disease Association of America. He also formed the Sickle Cell Detection and Information Center. Whitten became program director for the Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center at Wayne State University in 1973. In 2002, Whitten was named Michiganiaan of the Year, and in 2004, was named distinguished professor of pediatrics, emeritus at Wayne State University.

Whitten passed away on August 14, 2008 at the age of 86. He is survived by his wife, Eloise Culmer Whitten, an expert in family and social policy who has served on many boards of directors, including Planned Parenthood (local, national, and international) and First Independent Bank. Together, they supported a number of worthy causes, including a clinic in Haiti.

Whitten was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 8, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Charles Whitten was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 8, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pediatrician Dr. Charles Whitten (1922 - 2008) was an expert on sickle cell anemia.

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:

Whitten, Charles F.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Whitten, Charles F.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Pediatrician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Dr. Charles Whitten, March 8, 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).

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 Dr. Charles Whitten, Section A2007_079_001_001, TRT: 0:28:38 ?

Dr. Charles Whitten was born on February 2, 1922 in Wilmington, Delaware to Emma Carr Whitten and Tobias Whitten. His maternal grandfather, Hugh Carr, was a former slave who became a successful farmer in Charlottesville, Virginia, where Whitten's mother was born. She and her sisters inherited the farm and sold it to the Nature Conservancy, which established the land as a historical and ecological site. Whitten's mother graduated from the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in Petersburg, Virginia. She found work as a domestic in Wilmington, where she met Whitten's father, whose family originated in The Meadows of Goose Creek, Virginia. In Wilmington, Whitten's father taught civics and history at Howard High School, while his mother taught at a reformatory school. His paternal aunt, Alice Whitten, who was a teacher in Philadelphia, also helped raise Whitten and his three siblings. Whitten grew up on the east side of Wilmington, where his neighbors included the family of jazz trumpeter Clifford Brown.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Charles Whitten, Section A2007_079_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Dr. Charles Whitten began his education at the all-black No. 5 School in Wilmington, Delaware. He was a dedicated student, and attended Sunday school at Wilmington's Shiloh Baptist Church. In his free time, he delivered newspapers like the Pittsburgh Courier and The Philadelphia Inquirer. He also enjoyed sports, but was unable to play after suffering several hip injuries. During the Great Depression, his mother rented rooms in their home to boarders. After Whitten graduated from Howard High School, he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where he majored in zoology. He commuted from Wilmington; and, as a result of his living situation, missed opportunities on campus, including access to study groups. Whitten went on to attend Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, where he studied pathology under Dr. William S. Quinland. In 1945, he interned at Harlem Hospital in New York City, and then opened a general medical practice in Lackawanna, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Charles Whitten, Section A2007_079_001_003, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Dr. Charles Whitten opened a general medical practice in Lackawanna, New York, where he was the only African American physician in the mid-1940s. After five years there, Whitten served for two years in the U.S. Army, and then began a residency in pediatrics at The Children's Hospital of Buffalo in Buffalo, New York. Around this time, Kennedy met his wife, who was visiting Buffalo for a Delta Sigma Theta Sorority event. In 1955, they moved to Detroit, Michigan, where Whitten began a fellowship in pediatric hematology at the Children's Hospital of Michigan. There, he later founded a dedicated clinic for sickle cell patients. Whitten went on to integrate the staff of the Detroit Receiving Hospital, where he became the chief of pediatric medicine. In the early 1970s, Whitten cofounded the National Association for Sickle Cell Diseases with Dorothy Boswell. Whitten talks about sickle cell disease, and Detroit's all-black hospitals. He also reflects upon his career.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Charles Whitten, Section A2007_079_001_004, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Dr. Charles Whitten cofounded the National Association for Sickle Cell Diseases, and served as its president for nineteen years. In that role, he worked with organizations like the March of Dimes Foundation and the Congressional Black Caucus to develop sickle cell research programs. Whitten served on the faculty of the Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, Michigan, where he was also the director of the Sickle Cell Detection and Information

Center, one of fifteen comprehensive centers mandated by President Richard Nixon's National Sickle Cell Anemia Control Act of 1972. Whitten worked to recruit students of color to the medical school, and instituted a post baccalaureate program that gained national recognition. He also developed a preschool literacy program to serve Detroit's African American community. Whitten describes the lack of education about sickle cell disease in the Caribbean and Africa, as well as the advancements in sickle cell research.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Charles Whitten, Section A2007_079_001_005, TRT: 0:29:33 ?

Dr. Charles Whitten was a professor of pediatric medicine at the Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, Michigan. There, he established a post baccalaureate program that attracted a large number of African American graduates to the school. Whitten also created a preschool literacy program for Detroit's African American residents. In addition, Whitten and his wife, Eloise Culmer Whitten, established a foundation to fund projects like the development of Clinique Whitten, a health clinic near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. They had two daughters: psychologist Lisa Whitten, who was a professor in the State University of New York System; and pediatrician Wanda Whitten-Shurney, who directed the sickle cell program at the Children's Hospital of Michigan. Whitten talks about sickle cell disease awareness, as well as hospital integration in the United States. He reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.