Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers ® Video Oral History with James Collier, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Collier, James, 1924-2011
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Collier, Jr.,
Dates:	October 17, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocasettes (2:08:30).
Abstract:	Elementary school teacher and engineer James Collier, Jr. (1924 - 2011) invented and patented the silicon splicing process for today's silicon chips. Collier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 17, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_293
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Elementary school teacher and engineer James Collier was born on October 18, 1924 in Jackson, Tennessee to Lucille and James Collier, Sr. Collier's grandmother ran a boarding house for Pullman porters, and his maternal great grandmother lived to be 111 years old. A retired quality control engineer for Monsanto, Collier was the inventor of the process by which Monsanto sliced and coated silicon chips for electronic information storage. Growing up in Jackson, Tennessee, he attended South Jackson Elementary School in an integrated neighborhood. At segregated Merry High School in Jackson, Collier was an outstanding musician. He sang and played the violin and trombone. Before graduation in 1942, Collier and the members of the choir refused to entertain the white state school superintendent. They let the elaborate intro music play and stood mute.

Drafted into World War II in 1943, Collier was discharged in 1946. He graduated from Jackson's Lane College with his B.S. degree in social science and music in 1949. Collier also took graduate courses at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri. Collier started working for the St. Louis Board of Education in 1950 as a substitute teacher, then as a sixth grade teacher. Also working after hours as a musician and band leader, he played trombone with his group, Jim Collier and the Rhythmaires and promoted acts like Chuck Berry, Eddie Kendall, Archie Burnside, Nancy Wilson, Otis Hightower, Art Blakely, Ernie Wilkins, Jimmy Forrest and Jimmy Smith.

In 1980, Collier invented and patented a silicon slicing process for today's silicon chips. Monsanto Electronics established a plant to produce the chips in 1963, where Collier experimented and developed the slicing process.

Collier was the founder of Operation Family and works with youth, mentoring and teaching them voice and stage presence. For many years, he produced his own cable television show. The broad range of subjects covered by Collier include the works of Tyler Perry, black land distribution after the Civil War, St. Louis gang culture and an award winning Black History Month program. Collier also published a book of his poetry and was developing his talent as a painter.

Collier passed away on June 1, 2011 at the age of 86.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Collier, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 17, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocasettes. Elementary school teacher and engineer James Collier, Jr. (1924 - 2011) invented and patented the silicon splicing process for today's silicon chips.

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:

Collier, James, 1924-2011

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Collier, James, 1924-2011 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Engineer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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 Collier, Jr., October 17, 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 James Collier, Jr., Section A2007_293_001_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

James Collier talks about his mother and father's family background. His mother, Lucile Alma Collier was born on April 25, 1900 in Stanton, Tennessee to Lula Brooks and Benjamin Brooks. Collier's grandmother was an entrepreneur who helped start the Union Protective Insurance Company and ran a boarding house for Pullman Porters. Collier's mother went to Merry High School in Jackson Tennessee. Collier's father, James Alexander Collier, Sr. was

a carpenter, the son of a circuit rider preacher. Collier's father was taught to read and write by his wife and later went to Hub City Trade School to become a teacher. Collier ended up teaching at the same school as his father. Collier talks about growing up in South Jackson, Tennessee. The neighborhood was integrated but was heavily segregated with separate facilities for blacks and whites. Collier attended an all black South Jackson High School and graduated from Merry High School.

African American families--Tennessee.

African American businesspeople--Tennessee.

Pullman porters.

Race relations--Tennessee.

African American schools--Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with James Collier, Jr., Section A2007_293_001_002, TRT: 0:27:10 ?

James Collier talks about his experiences with civil disobedience in high school. His class refused to sing for a white superintendent, he took down "white" and "colored" signs at the courthouse and had a "sit-down" at army barracks which did not house African American soldier's families. Collier was drafted into the US Army 1943, and he was first placed in the cryptology department but later became part of the 340 Army Service Force Band. The band played all over the South selling war bonds. Collier talks about meeting his wife and attending Lane College. Collier married his first wife during his furlough. He left the army in 1946 and then attended Lane College where he studied social science. During this time he traveled with a band at night, playing at dances in nearby towns.

Civil disobedience--United States.

African American high school students--Tennessee.

Discrimination in public accommodations--United States.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Cryptography.

Video Oral History Interview with James Collier, Jr., Section A2007_293_001_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

James Collier talks about leaving Jackson, Tennessee and moving to St. Louis, Missouri where he worked as a music and chemistry teacher. At night, he played with his band, one of the first African American pit bands to play in downtown St. Louis. Collier talks about leaving his first wife and joining the Monsanto Company. He went into research and development at Monsanto Company where he developed procedures to make silicon chips. Collier was very successful at Monsanto where he created a new silicon blade that the company patented. Despite his success, Collier's managers looked down on him and tried to take credit for his work. Collier talks about his activism during the Civil Rights Movement. He started Operation Family, an organization to bring black and white families together.

African American educators--(Saint Louis, Mo.).

African American musicians--(Saint Louis, Mo.).

Monsanto Company.

Discrimination in employment.

Civil rights workers.

Video Oral History Interview with James Collier, Jr., Section A2007_293_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

James Collier explains how to make a silicon chip. The process involves slicing thin pieces of silicon and coating them with many layers. Collier left Monsanto in 1985 to become a manager at Silicon Technology Corporation in Oakland,

New Jersey. He worked there for two years before resigning to spend more time with his family. Collier talks about producing music shows and television programs. The music shows featured famous jazz musicians such as Art Blakey, Wynton Marsalis and Etta James. He produced 'Nothing but Spirit' a television show focused on church services. Collier ends by talking about his family. He considers his legacy to be his work with silicon splicing techniques.

Silicon industry.

Employees--Resignation.

Television Production and direction.

Music television.

African American jazz musicians.

Video Oral History Interview with James Collier, Jr., Section A2007_293_001_005, TRT: 0:12:30 ?

James Collier narrates his photos.

Photographs.