

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kojo Kamau

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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>	Kamau, Kojo
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 5, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:36:52).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer Kojo Kamau (1939 - 2016 ) opened the Kojo Photo Art Studio in 1978 and founded the Art for Community Expression (ACE) non-profit in 1979. Kamau was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 5, 2012, in Columbus, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_107
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Photographer Kojo Kamau was born on October 11, 1939 in Columbus Ohio to Robert Jones, a railroad worker and Elizabeth Patterson, a housewife. Kamau grew interested in photography from an early age and bought his first camera when he was a teenager. He graduated from East High School in Columbus, Ohio in 1957 and went on to study at the Columbus Art School (now the Columbus College of Art and Design). In 1960, Kamau joined the United States Air Force where he worked as a information specialist editing the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base newspaper.

After four years of service, Kamau returned to Columbus and began working for the Ohio State University's School of Medical Professions (now the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences) as a photographer in the medical illustration department. In 1974, Kamau began photographing one of his favorite subjects, the legendary barber and woodcutter Elijah Pierce. Kamau opened the Kojo Photo Art Studio in 1978 with his late wife, Mary Ann Williams. Williams was the host of WOSU's TV program "Afrotation." On the set, Kamau was able to photograph many local and national celebrities. Disturbed by the negative images of African Americans in the '60s and '70s, he used his photography to show positive images of African Americans and people of the African Diaspora. Kamau first travelled to Africa in 1978, and has made eleven subsequent trips. In 1979, Kamau and Williams established the Art for Community Expression (ACE) non-profit venture to help promote African American artists. ACE was also able to sponsor trips to Africa for three local artists. In 1986, ACE opened its own gallery in Columbus, Ohio. Kamau retired from his position as chief medical photographer at the Ohio State University in 1994 and became a photography instructor at Columbus State Community College in 1997. Kamau published a book of photographs, entitled *Columbus Remembered* in 2006. Three years later, the Columbus Museum of Art celebrated Kamau's seventieth birthday with an exhibition entitled, "Kojo: Fifty Years of Photography." Kamau's photographs are in the permanent collections of the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus Metropolitan Library and the Columbus Foundation. His photographs were exhibited throughout the United States, including the Indianapolis Art Center, Dillard University, Bowling Green State University, Northern Kentucky University, Ohio Wesleyan University, Akron University, Ohio University, the Chicago Center of Science and

Industry and the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. His work was also exhibited internationally at the Gallery 44 Center for Contemporary photography in Toronto, Canada; during Culturefest '93 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa; and the Central Bank of the Bahamas in Nassau, Bahamas.

Kamau was recognized numerous times for his photography and commitment to the community. He received the 2006 Ohioanna Library Career Award and the 2004 Columbus Winterfair Award of Excellence. Kamau was a member of the Columbus Museum of Art and Ohio Designer Craftsmen. He lived in Columbus, Ohio.

Kojo Kamau was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 5, 2012.

Kamau passed away on December 12, 2016 at age 77.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kojo Kamau was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 5, 2012, in Columbus, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Photographer Kojo Kamau (1939 - 2016 ) opened the Kojo Photo Art Studio in 1978 and founded the Art for Community Expression (ACE) non-profit in 1979.

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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®.

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## 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:

Kamau, Kojo

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Kamau, Kojo--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:

Photographer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Kojo Kamau, April 5, 2012. 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 Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:46 ?

Kojo Kamau was born on October 11, 1939 in Columbus, Ohio to Elizabeth Patterson Perkins and Robert Jones, Sr. His maternal grandmother, Nancy Patterson, was born in North Carolina and moved to Ashland, Kentucky, where Kamau's mother was born in 1913. His father was born in Tallahassee, Florida in 1914. In Columbus, Kamau's father worked as a chauffeur and at the railroad company icehouse, while his mother managed the home and raised him and his brother, Charles Jones. Kamau's parents divorced when he was nine years old, after which he rarely saw his father. Instead, Kamau was influenced by his paternal grandfather, Handy Jones; and later his stepfather, James Perkins. Kamau lived with his family on the East Side of Columbus, where he grew up in a thriving African American community with many black-owned businesses, movie theaters and nightclubs. There, Kamau frequented the Spring Street YMCA and belonged to the Boy Scouts of America.

Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:51 ?

Kojo Kamau grew up in Columbus, Ohio, where he began his education at the all-black Mount Vernon Avenue School. He later transferred to Garfield Elementary School, where he befriended future professional athlete and actor Bernie Casey. Kamau developed an interest in photography around the age of ten years old, when he saw his Boy Scout master, Thomas Yates, taking photographs during a camping trip. Soon after, Kamau enrolled at Franklin Junior High School, and began taking photographs that were inspired by National Geographic and Popular Science magazines. Upon completing junior high school in 1954, Kamau matriculated at East High School in Columbus, where he was exposed to an integrated faculty and student body for the first time. His coursework focused on art, photography and business. He also joined the glee club, and enrolled in the school's radio class, where he was selected to serve as an announcer for the day on the citywide WCBE Radio station.

Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:47 ?

Kojo Kamau attended East High School in Columbus, Ohio, where he participated in the glee club and the All-City Chorus. Wanting to ensure his graduation in 1957, Kamau attended summer school following his junior year, which allowed him to focus on his art courses during his senior year. Upon graduating, Kamau interned as a photographer at the Call and Post newspaper while working as a lab assistant at the Columbus Children's Hospital. After meeting local photographers George Pierce and Roosevelt Carter, Kamau decided to enroll at the Columbus Art School to pursue a career in photography. At this time, he mainly photographed the architecture and infrastructure in Columbus. Many of these images were compiled in the book, 'Columbus Remembered,' which was published in 2008. Before completing his degree at the Columbus Art School, Kamau enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he served as the photographer and editor of the newspaper at the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base in South Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:08 ?

Kojo Kamau was stationed at the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base in South Carolina. He served as the photographer and editor of the base newspaper, which became the top rated publication in the U.S. Air Force. While stationed in South Carolina, Kamau faced discrimination from the newspaper's all-white printing company and the city's segregated institutions. He successfully advocated for a gym on base, as the members of the integrated basketball team were barred from

practicing together in town. After his discharge in 1964, Kamau returned to his hometown of Columbus, Ohio to work as a medical photographer at The Ohio State University. In this role, he created educational films and photographs for the College of Medicine. He remained there until 1978, when he left to open the Kojo Photo Art Studio with his wife, Mary Ann Williams. Kamau also served as the official photographer of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and photographed guests like Alex Haley on his wife's television show, 'Afromation.'

Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:41 ?

Kojo Kamau and his wife, television host Mary Ann Williams, traveled to Africa for the first time in 1978. Inspired by their experiences, the couple founded Art for Community Expression (ACE), a nonprofit organization, to help African American artists fund trips to Africa. Through ACE, Kamau sent local artists like Aminah Robinson and Larry Winston Collins to work and study in Africa; and, upon their return to Columbus, Ohio, exhibited their artwork at the ACE Gallery in the Short North Arts District. In 2009, Kamau was honored with a retrospective exhibition of his photographs at the Columbus Museum of Art. He was acquainted with a number of notable black artists, including local folk artist Elijah Pierce, as well as internationally known photographers Gordon Parks and James Van Der Zee. Kamau talks about his artistic philosophy, digital photography and the arts community in Columbus. He also reflects upon the legacy of his wife, who passed away in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Kojo Kamau, Section A2012\_107\_001\_006, TRT: 6:11:39 ?

Kojo Kamau received numerous awards and honors for his fifty years of photographic work in Columbus, Ohio. His accolades included the Ohioana Library Association Career Award and exhibitions at The Kings Arts Complex in Columbus. He was honored with a retrospective exhibition titled 'Kojo: Fifty Years in Photographs' at the Columbus Museum of Art, and published a collection of his work in the book, 'Columbus Remembered.' In addition to his commercial and fine art work, Kamau also taught photography and dark room techniques at Columbus State Community College. Kamau reflects upon his legacy and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also shares his advice for future generations, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.