

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Welton Ivan Taylor

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Taylor, Welton Ivan, 1919-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor,
Dates:	March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	14 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:46:45).
Abstract:	Bacteriologist Welton Ivan Taylor (1919 - 2012) discovered that antibiotics can treat tetanus and gas gangrene. Taylor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_056
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

World-renowned scientist and educator Welton I. Taylor was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on November 12, 1919. His family moved to Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood shortly thereafter where Taylor attended DuSable High School, graduating as Class Valedictorian in 1937. Impressed by Taylor's performance at DuSable, local African American businessmen from the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity sponsored his undergraduate education in bacteriology at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana for all four years. Taylor graduated in 1941 with a B.S. in Bacteriology and a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Field Artillery. He deployed to the South Pacific as a Liaison Pilot in the 93rd Infantry Division, the first all-African American division to enter combat in World War II. At war's end, Taylor returned to his alma mater to earn M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in bacteriology on the G.I. Bill.

In 1948, Taylor joined the faculty of the University of Illinois' College of Medicine and immediately began research on the treatment of gas gangrene and tetanus—two infections plaguing victims of World War II. His discovery that both infections could be controlled by antibiotics found in any local pharmacy was lauded by the *Annals of Surgery* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and the New York State Department of Civil Defense incorporated his recommendations into their civil defense plans for the state.

In 1954, the Chicago meatpacking firm Swift & Company recruited Taylor to tackle an outbreak of salmonella poisoning in baby food. Taylor not only solved the problem, he standardized his successful approach and disseminated his methodology to microbiology labs worldwide. Taylor became Microbiologist-in-Chief at Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital in 1959 and in 1961, he was granted a Special Research Fellowship by the National Institutes of Health (NIH-NAIAD) to help British and French scientists eradicate salmonella poisoning in their countries' imported meats. He returned to Children's Memorial in 1962 and soon developed new methods of bacterial detection that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and similar agencies around the world rely on today to declare foods salmonella-free. In 1985, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta recognized Taylor for this work, naming a new bacterium, *Enterobacter taylorae*, in honor of Taylor and a

British colleague. Welton Taylor is the first African American to be so honored.

During his 50-year long career, Taylor patented four products, published 40 articles in scientific journals (and became the first African American on the editorial boards of three of them), taught microbiology both at the University of Illinois and at Northwestern University Medical School and helped eleven Chicago-area hospitals, seven corporations, three government agencies, and the CDC address Legionnaire's disease, toxic shock syndrome, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS. Taylor actively mentored younger microbiologists and lived to see his ground-breaking research become a continual source of influence on scientists today.

A staunch civil rights activist and community leader, Taylor was one of the first African Americans to integrate Chicago's Chatham neighborhood where he served as President of the Chatham Avalon Park Community Council, founded the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, and received the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews for his efforts. He received alumni achievement awards from both the University of Illinois and DuSable High School and received the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to the Tuskegee Airmen in 2007. In May of 2016, Dr. Taylor will be inducted into the National Inventors' Hall of Fame, joining the ranks of inventors Thomas Edison, Eli Whitney, George Washington Carver, Percy Julian, Orville Wright, Steve Jobs, and over 500 others whose inventions have "benefitted humanity."

Taylor married Jayne Rowena Kemp in 1945 and enjoyed 59 years of marriage until Jayne's death in 2005. The couple raised two daughters, Karyn and Shelley, a Trial Consultant and Educator, respectively. In July 2012, Dr. Taylor published his World War II memoir, *Two Steps from Glory*. He passed away three months later on November 1, 2012, just eleven days shy of his 93rd birthday.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Welton Ivan Taylor was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes. Bacteriologist Welton Ivan Taylor (1919 - 2012) discovered that antibiotics can treat tetanus and gas gangrene.

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:

Taylor, Welton Ivan, 1919-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Taylor, Welton Ivan, 1919---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Bacteriologist

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 Welton Ivan Taylor, March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003. 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 Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor begins by detailing his family history and his ancestors on both sides of his family, explaining his multiethnic heritage. Taylor tells of his genealogical research, which allowed him to discover his family history. He also describes his family's migration from Alabama to Chicago, which were prompted by threats from the Ku Klux Klan. His mother Cora Lee Brewer was born on February 2, 1880 in Florence, Alabama to the famous Brewer family. The family was of Cherokee Indian, Irish, African and German descent. She was one of fifteen children, five of which died early on. Her parents names were Buchanan and Millie Brewer. Taylor's father was was born on July 27,1887. He was the first African American to own a business in Downtown Birmingham, Alabama-- a tailor shop called "Taylor the Tailor". His father was the tailor and his mother worked in the shop as a seamstress.

Family histories.

Racially mixed people--America.

Trail of Tears, 1838-1839.

Taylor, Zachary, 1784-1850--Family.

Klu-Klux-Klan--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor remembers his cousin, famed blues songwriter W. C. Handy. He describes the challenges his parents faced after they moved from Alabama to Chicago, including the Great Depression. He vividly recounts the Chicago race riot of 1919, which occurred a few months before his birth. Taylor explains how two of his relatives were nearly beaten to death. Taylor then shares examples of how his father's advice helped him as a child.

Handy, W. C. (William Christopher), 1873-1958

African Americans--Migrations--History--20th century.

Great Depression.

Chicago (Ill.)--Riot, 1919.

Race discrimination--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls growing up in Chicago and in Peoria, Illinois, where his family moved during the Depression. Taylor compares his experience in the

two cities. He explains that he moved back to Chicago to attend DuSable High School, where Timuel Black and Dempsey Travis were classmates of his. He remembers his early interest in science and nature, and shares his college aspirations. Taylor explains how members of the African American community sponsored his education at the University of Illinois.

Childhood and youth--Illinois.

DuSable High School.

Black, Timuel D.

Science--Scholarships, fellowships, etc.

University of Illinois at Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor details the scientific contributions of his idol, Louis Pasteur, and explains the sciences of microbiology and bacteriology, which he studied at the University of Illinois. He then recalls his participation in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) while at Illinois, and explains the process that led to his promotion to second lieutenant.

Pasteur, Louis, 1822-1895--Influence.

Immunology--History.

Immunology--Experiments.

Microbiology--Vocational guidance.

United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_005, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor details his experiences as the only black officer at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was confronted with many instances of racism and discrimination in the Army, including segregated railcars and officers who did not want to command black troops. Taylor also discusses everyday life on the army base and recalls his introduction to aviation.

African American soldiers.

Fort Sill (Okla.).

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Segregation in transportation.

Airplanes--Piloting.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_006, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor continues to discuss the racism and discrimination he experienced in the U.S. Army. He also speaks about how he overcame it. Taylor successfully suggested to his commanding officer that an old abandoned barracks building on base be remodeled into a post exchange (PX) and recreational building. In this way, African American soldiers could avoid the hostile racism of army life in Lawton, Oklahoma. He recounts that the recreational room was so popular that it became integrated instantly. When Taylor was transferred to Fort Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan, he received a bad report which prevented him from getting a promotion. However, the commanding officer who gave Taylor the rating was forced to change it. This allowed Taylor to be promoted to first lieutenant.

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Yellow fever--Prevention.

Hepatitis B--Diagnosis.

Military promotions.

Fort Custer (Mich.).

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_007, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor continues to describe his service in the U.S. Army, highlighting his intelligence training at Fort Custer, Michigan, and recalling the completion of his pilot's training. He explains why he chose to fly in combat overseas rather than remaining a flight instructor at home. Taylor also recalls his transfer to Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

Fort Custer (Mich.).

Military intelligence--United States--Study and teaching.

Discrimination in public accommodations--United States.

Airplanes--Piloting.

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_008, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor details his experiences overseas during World War II, sharing his observations of the Battle of Guadalcanal. He explains how he flew reconnaissance missions at Guadalcanal and recounts a visit from famed pilot, Charles Lindbergh. Taylor talks about how his interest in photography landed him in trouble with a superior officer. He also recalls how he challenged the existence of segregated facilities for officers.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

Guadalcanal, Battle of, Solomon Islands, 1942-1943

Reconnaissance aircraft—Piloting.

Lindbergh, Charles A. (Charles Augustus), 1902-1974--Public appearances.

African Americans--Segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_009, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls his adventures flying in Papua New Guinea during World War II, detailing his non-combat missions and his favorite planes to fly. He then recounts his return home to the states, where he married his wife Jayne (née) Kemp in 1945. Taylor then explains attending the University of Illinois for graduate school under the G.I. Bill. Taylor describes his living situation and recalls how he and his wife worked to end discrimination and segregation on campus.

Air pilots, Military.

Papua New Guinea.

Veterans--Education--Law and legislation--United States.

African American veterans--Education (Higher).

University of Illinois at Chicago. Graduate College.

College students--Political activity--Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_010, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls earning his Ph.D. in bacteriology from the University of Illinois in June of 1948-- despite the objections of a racist professor. He then recounts his early career as a microbiologist for the University of Illinois

Medical School, and describes the incident where he cemented his reputation for doing anything to help a patient. Taylor then goes on to explain why he accepted a position at Swift and Company, where he investigated an outbreak of salmonella at one of the meatpacking company's plants.

Microbiology--Study and teaching (Higher).

Racism in higher education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_011, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Welton Taylor recalls his career with Swift & Company. He discusses his contributions to their operation, as well as their reluctance to handle widespread salmonella and E. coli contamination.

Swift & Company.

Salmonella food poisoning.

Meat--Microbiology.

Food--Pasteurization.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_012, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Welton Taylor remembers his transition from Swift & Company to the Pasteur Institute in Lille, France. He recounts his experiences living in Europe, particularly his work for the Pasteur Institute and the World Health Organization.

Meat-packing industry--Standards.

World Health Organization.

Institut Pasteur Lille (France).

African American families--Europe.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_013, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Welton Taylor shares his thoughts on racism in the military, and the contemporary state of race relations. He also reflects back on his life and career.

Race discrimination--United States--History.

International travel.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_014, TRT: 0:24:45 ?

Photographs.

African American families.