

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Felton James Earls

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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>	Earls, Felton
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Felton James Earls,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 9, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:40).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Medical professor and public health professor Felton James Earls (1942 - ) is a professor of social medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Human Behavior and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health. Earls' Chicago research project, "The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods," led to theories that derailed older ones of community violence and crime. Earls was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 9, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_259
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. Felton James "Tony" Earls is a professor of social medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Human Behavior and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health. He is noted for his pioneering research on violent crime reduction in urban neighborhoods, the causes and pathways of juvenile delinquency, the consequences of children's exposure to community and family violence and the psychological impacts of HIV/AIDS pandemic on children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Earls was born in January 1942 in New Orleans, Louisiana – the oldest of four born to Ethlyn and Felton Earls II. In 1953, his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where his father worked for the U.S. Postal Service, and where Earls graduated from Booker T. Washington High School.

A 1963 graduate of Howard University with a degree in chemistry – four years later, Earls received a medical degree from Howard University School of Medicine. Being interested in the science of medicine rather than caring for sick people, he pursued post-graduate training in neurophysiology at the University of Wisconsin.

Earls left Wisconsin to do a residency in pediatrics at New York Medical College. He went on to study adult psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and child psychiatry at the Hospital for Sick Children in London. He joined the faculty of Harvard Medical School in 1974, became Professor of Child Psychiatry and Director of the Division of Child Psychiatry at Washington University in St. Louis in 1981 and returned to Harvard University in 1989.

Earls' Chicago research project, "The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods," funded by the National Institute for Mental Health and the MacArthur Foundation, is perhaps his signature work – a ten year, \$51 million study. It was a large-scale epidemiological project examining causes and consequences of children's

exposure to community and family violence. Earls and his team of researchers studied the physical health, educational and occupational achievement, and the social relationships of children from birth to adulthood. He gave detailed attention to the social and physical characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they lived and the schools they attended. The project represents one of the largest and most comprehensive (over 8,000 people in 343 Chicago neighborhoods) of child and youth development ever undertaken. Theories drawn from his finding derailed older theories of community violence and crime. His “collective efficacy” theory puts emphasis on a practice of having neighborhood residents solving the problems of crime, violence and substance abuse. In another project in Tanzania, East Africa, Earls used his Chicago study methods to analyze the role of community attitudes and perceptions about HIV/AIDS and its impact on children.

Earls is the Director of the Harvard South Africa Fellowship Program at Harvard University, established to address the needs of South Africans denied access to advanced education by apartheid. Another major and significant activity in his life is serving on the Board of Directors of Physicians for Human Rights at the National Academy of Sciences.

Earls met Mary Carlson, who was studying neurophysiology at the University of Wisconsin when he was doing the same. They were married in Boston in 1971 and are the parents of two daughters, Leigh, born in 1967, and Tanya, born in 1974.

Earls has been devoted to scientific research with a commitment to social change in the spirit and memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Felton James Earls was conducted by Robert Hayden on December 9, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Medical professor and public health professor Felton James Earls (1942 - ) is a professor of social medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Human Behavior and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health. Earls’ Chicago research project, “The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods,” led to theories that derailed older ones of community violence and crime.

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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:

Earls, Felton

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Earls, Felton--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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Harvard Medical School

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## Occupations:

Medical Scientist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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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 Dr. Felton James Earls, December 9, 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).

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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 Dr. Felton James Earls, Section A2005\_259\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

Felton James Earls was born on January 20, 1942 to Ethelyn Lefebvre Earls and Felton Earls, II in New Orleans, Louisiana. His maternal grandparents were Creole and from Alexandria, Louisiana. His grandfather received a medal of honor from the government of France for his U.S. military service in World War I. Earls' mother was born and raised in New Orleans, where she attended McDonogh No. 35 Senior High School. Earls' father was born in 1915 and was reared by his mother and maternal uncles in New Orleans. Earls spent his early childhood in the Calliope Housing Project, which his father managed before enlisting in the U.S. Army during World War II. Returning from the Philippines, he was stationed in Georgia and Oklahoma, then was employed as a postal clerk, sorting mail between New Orleans and Houston, where Earls attended first grade. In New Orleans, Earls attended McDonogh No. 6 School and Samuel J. Green Junior High School. He also recalls his teachers, segregated buses and his early interest in chemistry.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Felton James Earls, Section A2005\_259\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Felton James Earls moved to Memphis, Tennessee for his father's postal service employment. In Memphis, Earls attended Booker T. Washington High School. Earls recounts how his high school principal prevented him from applying to Northwestern University due to fears about students adapting to majority-white schools. Instead, Earls attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he majored in chemistry and engaged in civil rights activism. He then entered Howard University College of Medicine where he studied anatomy with William Montague Cobb. In 1967, Earls worked in a neurophysiology laboratory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where he met his wife, Mary Carlson, with whom he raised two daughters, Leigh Earls Slayne and Tanya Earls. After Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, he reevaluated his career, and completed a psychiatry residency at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital. Earls recalls his initial impression of Boston as unwelcoming.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Felton James Earls, Section A2005\_259\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

Felton James Earls completed his child psychiatry training in London while

studying epidemiology and public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. After joining the Harvard Medical School faculty, he studied preschool children in Martha's Vineyard and inmate health at Boston's Charles Street Jail. In 1981, he received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct research at Washington University in St. Louis. There, he worked with Lee N. Robins, a leading psychiatric epidemiologist, and directed the Division of Child Psychiatry until returning to Harvard in 1989. Earls' research on urban crime and violence led to the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, and the findings of this study informed public policy, notably community policing programs. He co-authored "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," published in Science magazine. He also defines collective efficacy and describes his research on HIV/AIDS in Tanzania.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Felton James Earls, Section A2005\_259\_001\_004, TRT: 0:26:50 ?

Felton James Earls participated in the Anti-Apartheid Movement while living in St. Louis, Missouri. He helped lead a divestment campaign in Missouri, rendering it the twenty-fourth state to divest its pension funds from South Africa. While working at Harvard Medical School, Earls became involved with the Harvard South Africa Fellowship Program, which he eventually directed. He describes his musical interests; his hero, Charles Darwin; and his aspirations at the time of the interview. In reflecting upon his life, Earls relates how he went to court to be honorably discharged from the U.S. Army as a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, and his doubts about his decision to pursue science rather than commit to a career as an anti-war activist. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.