

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth L. Coleman

---

## 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>	Coleman, Kenneth L., 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 13, 2007 and June 29, 2022
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2022
<b>Physical Description:</b>	14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (7:01:14).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Technology executive Kenneth L. Coleman (1942 - ) held positions at Hewlett-Packard, Activision, Inc., and Silicon Graphics and founded Information Technology Management. He has served as chair of Accelrys, MIPS Technologies, Saama Technologies, and EIS Group Ltd. Coleman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 13, 2007 and June 29, 2022, in Los Altos Hills, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_135
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Technology executive Kenneth Louis Coleman was born on December 1, 1942 in Centralia, Illinois to Louis Boyd Coleman and Katie Owens Coleman. He attended Lincoln Elementary School and graduated from Centralia High School in 1960. He then studied at The Ohio State University, earning his B.S. degree in industrial management in 1965. He went on to acquire his M.B.A. degree from The Ohio State University in 1972.

Starting in 1968, Coleman served at Osan Air Base in South Korea as an officer in the U.S. Air Force. That year, Lieutenant Coleman helped effectively defuse a potential race riot on the base. This led to an assignment to establish an Office for Affirmative Action and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation in 1970 at Hamilton Air Force Base in Marin County, California. After discharge as a captain in 1972, Coleman was introduced to the Hewlett-Packard Company by Roy Clay, the first African American vice mayor of Palo Alto, California. At Hewlett-Packard, Coleman held several senior management positions, including a two-year assignment in Northern Europe from 1974 to 1976. In 1982, Coleman joined Activision, Inc., where he became vice president of product development. Coleman then joined Silicon Graphics (SGI) in 1987. During his fourteen years at Silicon Graphics, Coleman held several executive level positions. His last position at SGI was executive vice president of sales, services, and marketing, where he managed 4,000 employees in thirty-seven countries.

In 2001, Coleman founded and became CEO of ITM Software in Mountain View, California. Over the next five years, he raised \$20 million of venture capital. The company was later sold to BMC Software. In 2006, Coleman was appointed chairman of Accelrys, Inc., a scientific informatics software and services company for life sciences, chemical and materials research and development. He later served as chair of MIPS Technologies, Saama Technologies, and EIS Group Ltd. Coleman also has been a member of the boards of directors of City National Bank, United Online, Entertainment Partners, Prevedere, Management Leadership for Tomorrow, CSSA Insurance, and iBridge.

In 2010, Coleman was appointed to a special government advisory group on U.S./India Trade Policy. In 2019, Coleman joined the Council of the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Coleman is also the recipient of numerous honors, including The Ohio State University Distinguished Service Award and the National Alliance of Black School Educators Living Legend Award. In 1999, Coleman was named one of the ten most influential African Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area, and in 2001, one of the top 25 Black executives in technology by *Black Enterprise* magazine.

Coleman lives in Los Altos Hills, California with his wife, Caretha Coleman. They have six children and thirteen grandchildren.

Coleman was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 13, 2007 and June 29, 2022.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth L. Coleman was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson and Larry Crowe on April 13, 2007 and June 29, 2022, in Los Altos Hills, California, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Technology executive Kenneth L. Coleman (1942 - ) held positions at Hewlett-Packard, Activision, Inc., and Silicon Graphics and founded Information Technology Management. He has served as chair of Accelyrs, MIPS Technologies, Saama Technologies, and EIS Group Ltd.

---

## 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:

Coleman, Kenneth L., 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Coleman, Kenneth L., 1942- --Interviews

---

African American businesspeople--Interviews

---

Minorities in technology--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Silicon Graphics Computer Systems

---

## Occupations:

Technology Executive

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

---

## 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 Kenneth L. Coleman, April 13, 2007 and June 29, 2022. 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 Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman was born on December 1, 1942 in Centralia, Illinois to Katie Owens Coleman and Louis Coleman. His maternal grandparents were farmers, and moved to Centralia from Mounds, Illinois. His paternal grandfather, Thomas Coleman, was born a slave in Browns, Tennessee, and later worked as a sharecropper. When he threatened a white landowner who raped one of Coleman's paternal aunts, the family fled to Centralia to save him from a reprisal. In Centralia, Coleman's paternal grandfather worked for the Illinois Central Railroad, and his father worked at a wrought iron factory. Coleman's parents met and married in Centralia, where his mother was employed as a maid. His father served in the U.S. military during World War II; and, upon his return, briefly became Centralia's first black police officer. Coleman grew up in Centralia's all-black Stickney section, in a four-room house without indoor plumbing. He also recalls experiencing southern racism for the first time while visiting Browns with his father.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Minorities in technology--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman began his education at the all-black Lincoln School in Centralia, Illinois. He enjoyed basketball, and was inspired by his school principal, William Harold Walker, who was a former Tuskegee Airman and played basketball with the students at recess. Coleman was an average student until the fifth grade, when he decided to focus on his studies after receiving several corporal punishments for not completing his homework. From that time, he excelled academically, in addition to playing on the basketball, track and softball teams. He was also active at the New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, where he obtained his first leadership position as a junior deacon. In 1955, Coleman enrolled at the integrated Centralia High School. He campaigned successfully for secretary-treasurer of his freshman class, and became the first African American elected to the school's student council. Coleman talks about segregation in Centralia; and his neighbor, Roland Burris, who became a U.S. senator.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman attended the integrated Centralia High School in Centralia,

Illinois, where he was elected vice president of his sophomore class. He also served as president of the math club and German club, and played on the basketball team and football team. He experienced racial discrimination from the white faculty, including his history teacher, who discouraged him from running for junior class president; and the principal, who reprimanded him for befriending a white female classmate. In 1960, Coleman graduated at the top of his class. At that time, he aspired to become a math teacher; and completed one year at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale before transferring in 1962 to The Ohio State University in Columbus. There, he switched his major to industrial management with a business and engineering focus, and worked as a computer operator in the research center. He was also one of the first pupils at the school to join the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, an honor society for business students.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman received a bachelor's degree at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, and remained there to earn a master's degree in business. He studied at The Ohio State University College of Administrative Science, where he had two black peers, including William Bradford, who became a noted economist. While there, Coleman wrote a Fortran computer program that automated school registration and grading. In 1968, he was drafted into the U.S. Air Force. He was sent to Illinois' Scott Air Force Base, and then to Korea, where he negotiated with North Korean forces after the capture of the USS Pueblo. He received a promotion to captain, and served as a mediator during a protest held by a group of black officers on base. After one year, Coleman was assigned to the Hamilton Air Force Base in California, where he served as a social action officer, and oversaw affirmative action and drug rehabilitation programs. He left in 1972, and joined the Hewlett-Packard Company in California's Silicon Valley.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman was hired at the Hewlett-Packard Company (HP) in 1972. Two year later, he moved from Palo Alto, California to Switzerland, where he joined HP's human resources management team. He also worked in the Netherlands, where he was sometimes mistaken for Surinamese, and experienced discrimination as a result. In 1976, Coleman returned to Palo Alto, where he joined the management team for the HP 3000 commercial computer. In that role, he recruited African American technologists to the staff of HP. Coleman was promoted to the directorship of global staffing for HP in 1981; and, one year later, left to join Activision Publishing, Inc., where he oversaw the design and product development of video games like 'Kaboom!' and 'Pitfall!' In 1987, Coleman was recruited by Edward R. McCracken to become the chief administrative officer of Silicon Graphics, Inc. There, he met film directors George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Coleman also remembers the mentorship of executive Roy L. Clay, Sr., whom he met at HP.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:16 ?

Kenneth L. Coleman was promoted in 1997 from an administrative position at Silicon Graphics, Inc. (SGI) to manage the company's service business. He later headed SGI's marketing and sales division, where he supervised an international team of nearly seven thousand employees. In 2000, Coleman retired from SGI, and founded the ITM Software Corporation, which produced commercial

software to optimize information technology management. He grew the company's annual profits to \$10 million before retiring in 2006. Coleman then joined the public medical software company Accelrys, Inc., where he served as chairman of the board of directors. Coleman describes his charitable contributions to the community of Palo Alto, California, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also talks about his family and his advice to future generations, and reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered. Coleman concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_007, TRT: 7:31:12 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_008, TRT: 8:33:34 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_009, TRT: 9:35:26 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_010, TRT: 10:31:15 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_011, TRT: 11:32:50 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_012, TRT: 12:29:00 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_013, TRT: 13:35:36 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth L. Coleman, Section A2007\_135\_002\_014, TRT: 14:11:11 ?