

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Collins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins,
Dates:	March 10, 2011 and November 9, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2011 and 2012
Physical Description:	11 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:01:11).
Abstract:	Association branch chief executive and community leader Charles Collins (1947 -) was a Harvard trained lawyer known for his dedication to the San Francisco community, primarily in his position as president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 10, 2011 and November 9, 2012, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2011_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Community leader, association branch chief executive and Harvard trained lawyer Charles Collins was born on November 22, 1947 to Daniel Collins and DeReath Curtis James in the Fillmore community of San Francisco, California. After graduating from Tamalpais High School in 1965, Collins pursued higher education at Williams College, where he earned his B.A. degree with honors in 1969. Four years later, Collins earned his M.S. degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and subsequently his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1976.

Upon completing his education, Collins began his professional career working with the law firm of Steinhart and Falconer, and then the law firm of Berkeley and Rhodes. An active member of the San Francisco and California communities, Collins led a comprehensive study for the City and County of San Francisco in 1979 and subsequently became the deputy secretary of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency for the State of California in 1980. Collins has also served in leadership capacities as president and chairman of WDG Ventures, Inc., a real estate development firm in San Francisco; president and chief executive officer of the Family Service Agency of San Francisco; and president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco. In his work with the YMCA, Collins has supported its mission to strengthen the foundations of communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Collins has received much recognition for his work in community development, including the 2003 Bicentennial Award from Williams College. In 2005, Collins was named the senior vice chairman of the National Urban League. For his dedication to the organization, the National Urban League established the Charles Collins Award in his honor. Collins was the author of *The African Americans*, a collection of photographs recognizing the accomplishments of African Americans in various capacities. He was also the senior editor of *A Day in the Life of Africa*.

Collins is married to Paula Robinson Collins. They have two daughters, Sara DeReath Collins and Julia Elizabeth

Collins.

Collins was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 10, 2011 and November 9, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles Collins was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 10, 2011 and November 9, 2012, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 11 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Association branch chief executive and community leader Charles Collins (1947 -) was a Harvard trained lawyer known for his dedication to the San Francisco community, primarily in his position as president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco.

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:

Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Urban League

Occupations:

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Charles Collins, March 10, 2011 and November 9, 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).

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 Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_001, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Charles Collins was born on November 22, 1947 in San Francisco, California to Dereath Curtis James Collins and Daniel Andrew Collins. His mother's family are the owners of the oldest black-owned company in the United States, C.H. James & Co., which began as a trade business along the James River in Virginia. Collins describes his maternal grandparents, Edward Lawrence James and Stella Shaw James, his maternal grandmother's family lineage and his father's family background. Collins discusses his family's relationship with Howard Thurman and the significant role he played in Collins' family's history. Collins' describes how his parents met, his family's move to San Francisco during World War II, his four siblings and earliest childhood memories.

African American families--California--San Francisco.

African American children--California--San Francisco.

African American business enterprises--West Virginia.

Thurman, Howard, 1900-1981.

African American grandparents.

World War, 1939-1945.

Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_002, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Charles Collins talks about his younger brother, Craig, who was born mentally handicapped. Collins and his siblings were concerned about their new brother's condition and this news raised Collin's personal feeling of responsibility. Collins has a close relationship with Craig and describes Craig as an amazing person. Collins grew up in San Francisco's Fillmore District, where he had full exposure to a variety of ethnicities, foods and religions. The Fillmore District was also characterized by its black-owned business, who also provided necessary services to the community. Collins remembers the shift from Japanese residents to black residents during World War II, and the Japanese internment. He talks about the sights, smells and sounds of his childhood, and his family's move to Mill Valley, California and then to Washington, D.C. in 1956.

African American children--California--San Francisco.

Children with mental disabilities.

Brothers and sisters.

African American business enterprises--California--San Francisco.

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

Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century.

World War, 1939-1945.

Japanese Americans--Evacuation and relocations, 1942-1945.

African American families--California--Mill Valley.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_003, TRT: 0:29:47 ?

Charles Collins discusses the Civil Rights Movement. Though he was young, he had a sense of the conflict happening around him through information from his parents. He describes going to meetings of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with his parents. Collins discusses the two years he spent in Washington, D.C., and the ways in which he changed upon his return to San Francisco in 1958. He reflects on the differences between San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and South Carolina, and the varying severity of segregation from state to state. Collins attended Edna Maguire Junior High School and Tamalpais High School, which was more integrated. He was president of his freshman class and a member of the honor society, but remarks that he avoided the shadow of his older brother. As a teenager, Collins listened to R&B artists but also grew up with classical music and jazz.

Civil rights movements.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

African American children--Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

African American children--California--San Francisco--Social life and customs.

Segregation--California--San Francisco.

Segregation--Washington (D.C.).

Segregation--South Carolina.

African Americans--Education (Primary)--California--Mill Valley.

African American teenagers--California--Social life and customs.

Brothers and sisters--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_004, TRT: 0:31:35 ?

Charles Collins discusses his college plans. During the fall of his senior year, Collins was informed that he was granted admission to Williams College in Massachusetts. He decided to attend because of its small student body and close student teacher relationships. As a student at Williams, Collins double majored in history and art history, and developed a love of African art through his father's personal collection. Collins describes his first impressions and experiences and how he struggled during the first two years at Williams. He talks about his art education and the time he spent with artist Romare Bearden. Bearden was the artist-in-residence at Williams and Collins benefited their relationship in many ways. He remarks that, at that time, there were no courses in African American studies at Williams, but later, a curriculum was established with grant money from Albert Schreck of Tamalpais High School.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--California--Mill Valley.

African American college students--Massachusetts--Boston.

Williams College.

Bearden, Romare, 1911-1988.

Art--History--Study and teaching.

African Americans--Art collectors and collecting.

Philanthropy.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_005, TRT: 0:29:53 ?

Charles Collins discusses his exposure to the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. In 1968, Collins traveled to Washington, D.C. to interview Rayford Logan and Sterling Allen Brown, both Williams alums and professors at Howard University. During his interview with Sterling Brown, news of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination was released. He recalls the immediate

violent reaction from Washington D.C. residents. Collins graduated from Williams College in 1969, and was awarded a Thompson J. Watson Foundation Fellowship. He traveled to Athens, Greece, under the auspices of family friend Whitney Young of the National Urban League. In Greece, Collins worked with architect and city planner Constantinos Doxiadis looking at large-scale city planning and theory. He then traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Collins talks about meeting his wife Paula, his research in Brazil, beginning graduate school at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the death of Whitney Young.

Civil rights movements.

Logan, Rayford Whittingham, 1897-1982.

Brown, Sterling Allen, 1901-1989.

Howard University.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Race riots--Washington (D.C.).

Williams College.

African Americans--International travel--Greece--Athens.

Young, Whitney M.

Civil rights workers.

African Americans--International travel--Brazil--Rio de Janeiro.

Young, Whitney M.--Death and burial.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Massachusetts.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Doxiades, Konstantinos Apostolou, 1913-1975.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_001_006, TRT: 0:20:19 ?

Charles Collins discusses his experience at Harvard Law School, the intensity of the program and the sense of community amongst the student body. Collins earned his J.D. degree in 1976, after which he returned to San Francisco, California and began working with Steinhart and Falconer, a corporate and real estate law firm. After two years with Steinhart and Falconer, Collins went to work for Berkeley and Rhodes, an African American law firm in Oakland, and joined California Governor Jerry Brown's administration. Collins describes the difference between working for Steinhart and Falconer and Berkeley and Rhodes as a matter of resources versus close contact with communities. He discusses Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple mass suicide and the impact of urban renewal in San Francisco. He links the two events, implicating gentrification and displacement as a conduit for the Peoples Temple, and ultimately the mass suicide that resulted.

Harvard Law School.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Massachusetts--Boston.

Practice of law--California--San Francisco.

African American lawyers--California--San Francisco.

Brown, Jerry, 1938-.

Jones, Jim, 1931-1978.

Jonestown Mass Suicide, Jonestown, Guyana, 1978.

Urban renewal--California--San Francisco.

Gentrification.

Corporation law.

Land tenure--Law and legislation.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_002_007, TRT: 7:29:15 ?

Charles Collins joined the law firm of Berkley and Rhodes in 1978. While there, he conducted a study for the San Francisco Planning Department on the potential growth of the Financial District in San Francisco, California. In 1980, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Collins deputy secretary of the State of California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. There, Collins oversaw the state's infrastructure, and was influential in the construction of Interstate 105 in Southern California that connected the Los Angeles International Airport with Bellflower, California. In 1983, Collins left his position with the state government, and started his own real estate company, Western Development Group (WDG). Through WDG, Collins acquired property throughout California and redeveloped the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center at Mount Zion in San Francisco. He also partnered with Millennium Partners to build the Metreon shopping center and the Four Season Hotel San Francisco on Market Street.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_002_008, TRT: 8:29:16 ?

Charles Collins grew up in the Fillmore District of San Francisco, California, which later underwent a massive redevelopment that gentrified the community. In 1989, an earthquake hit San Francisco while Collins and his family were watching the San Francisco Giants play the Oakland Athletics in the World Series at Candlestick Park. Then, in 1993, Collins published a book of photography titled 'The African Americans' with David Cohen. The introduction for the work was written by Collins' family friend, John Hope Franklin. Through hundreds of photographs, both historical and contemporary, this book celebrated the successes and diversity of African Americans throughout the country. Notable African Americans featured in 'The African Americans' were Venus Williams, Shirley Ann Jackson and Vernon E. Jordan. Included in the book was also the last known photograph taken of tennis star Arthur Ashe before he passed away. Collins then went on to publish 'A Day in the Life of Africa' with Cohen and Lee Liberman.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_002_009, TRT: 9:31:30 ?

Charles Collins and David Cohen collaborated with Lee Liberman in 2002 to create the book 'A Day in the Life of Africa.' To produce this book, Collins and his associates found almost one hundred photographers to travel to different parts of Africa and take photographs all on the same day, February 28, 2002. One of the photographs showed the reunion of a soldier and his mother in Cote d'Ivoire. The book was well received and published in several countries. Also in 2002, Collins became the president and CEO of the Family Service Agency of San Francisco. Two years later, Collins left to become the president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco. Collins' first initiative upon assuming the role was to unite the fourteen different branches of the YMCA of San Francisco to make them more cohesive and efficient. On behalf of the YMCA of San Francisco, Collins also travelled to Sri Lanka in 2004 to assist with relief and redevelopment following the tsunami that hit the country.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_002_010, TRT: 10:28:37 ?

Charles Collins served as president and CEO of the YMCA of San Francisco. While there, he focused the organization's programming on helping the youth in the community. He also built new facilities and oversaw the redevelopment of the Chinatown YMCA and Bayview Hunters Point YMCA. Throughout his career, Collins volunteered and served on the board of the National Urban League along with his father, Dr. Daniel A. Collins. In 2005, the Charles Collins

Award was established by the National Urban League to honor Collins for his dedication to the organization. Collins was a trustee of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts and the San Francisco State University Foundation. He was also a social policy advisor of the Bank of America Corporation and a member of Lambda Alpha International. Collins talks about his favorite artists like Kara Walker and Alonzo King. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon his life and the future of the YMCA of San Francisco.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011_010_002_011, TRT: 11:11:06 ?

Charles Collins and his wife, Paul Robinson Collins, had two daughters. Their oldest, Sara Collins, was an interventional cardiologist at the Medstar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., while Collins' younger daughter, Julia Collins, a Harvard University graduate, worked in the public safety and security industry before developing a food business in New York City. Collins reflects upon his legacy and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.