

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lilia Abron

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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>	Abron, Lilia, 1945-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 17, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:53:06).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Chemical engineer Lilia Abron (1945 - ) , the first African American woman to receive her Ph.D. in chemical engineering, founded PEER Consultants, an environmental engineering consulting firm. Abron was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 17, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_113
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Chief executive officer and chemical engineer Lilia Ann Abron was born on March 8, 1945 in Memphis, Tennessee. Her father was a school principal and her mother was a school teacher who taught art and geography. Abron attended Lemoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee where she received her B.S. degree in chemistry in 1966. She earned her M.S. degree in sanitary engineering from Washington University in St. Louis in 1968. After receiving her M.S. degree, Abron worked for the Kansas City Water Department. She went on to become a research engineer for the Metropolitan Sanitary District of Greater Chicago. Abron received her Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of Iowa in 1972, the first African American woman to do so.

After completing her education, Abron served as an assistant professor of civil engineering at Tennessee State University and held a joint appointment as an assistant professor of environmental engineering at Vanderbilt University. In 1975, she joined the faculty of Howard University as an assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering while serving as a consultant to local engineering firms. Abron founded PEER Consultants in 1978, an environmental engineering consulting firm that provides solutions to the problems of contamination of the environment. Her firm had contracts with the Superfund program including the Boston Harbor cleanup; the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy through its Hazardous Waste Remedial Actions Program. In 1995, Abron founded Peer Africa with the mission of building energy-efficient homes in post-apartheid South Africa. Peer Africa's Witsand iEEECO (Integrated Energy Environment Empowerment-cost Optimization) Sustainable Human Settlement won the American Academy of Engineers 2012 Superior Achievement Award.

Abron is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the International Women's Forum. Professionally, she is a member of the Water Environment Federation, American Water Works Association and American Society of Civil Engineers. She also serves on the Advisory Board for the College of Engineering, University of South Florida. Abron has been active in community serving as the president of the Washington DC chapter of Jack and Jill of

American, Inc., and as a board member for the Baptist Home for Children. She was an original participant of the 1975 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) study, “The Double Bind: The Price of Being a Minority Woman in Science.” In 1999, Abron was the recipient of the Hancher-Finkbine Alumni Medallion from the University of Iowa; in 2001, she was awarded the Magic Hands Award by LeMoyne-Owen College, and in 2004, she was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences. Abron has three adult sons.

Lilia Ann Abron was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 17, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lilia Abron was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 17, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Chemical engineer Lilia Abron (1945 - ) , the first African American woman to receive her Ph.D. in chemical engineering, founded PEER Consultants, an environmental engineering consulting firm.

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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:

Abron, Lilia, 1945-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

Abron, Lilia, 1945- --Interviews

## African Americans--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:

Chemical Engineer

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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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 Lilia Abron, June 17, 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 Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:36 ?

Lilia Abron talks about her family background. Her mother, Bernice Kathleen Wise, was born in August of 1919 in Claybrook, Arkansas. She lived through the Great Depression, and her family survived by raising their own crops and animals. Though her family did not have a lot of money, Bernice Abron was able to attend college with the help of her aunt. She attended Lemoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee, and later worked as a school teacher. As a result of her education, Abron's mother took an active role in managing her family's financial matters. Abron's father, Ernest Buford Abron, was born in Birmingham, Alabama. He was the son of a Pullman Porter, and his family can be traced back to slavery.

African American families--History.

Great Depression.

LeMoyne-Owen College--Alumni and alumnae.

Pullman porters--United States.

Slaves--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:16 ?

Lilia Abron talks about her father's family background. Her father, Ernest Buford Abron, attended Wilberforce University in Ohio and Wiles College before finishing his education at Lemoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee. He married Bernice Kathleen Wise, Abron's mother, after graduating from college. Abron talks about her memories of growing up and living in various parts of Memphis, Tennessee. One of Abron's earliest memories is of her mother presenting her with a special chair, which Abron still has. As a child, Abron was active in the Girl Scouts and in her church. Due to her aptitude, Abron was placed onto a science track when she was in the second grade. Although she aspired to pursue a career in the arts, she was encouraged to maintain her career path in the sciences.

Wilberforce University--Alumni and alumnae.

Married students--United States.

Memphis (Tenn.)--Description and travel.

Childhood and youth--Memphis (Tenn.).

Science--Vocational guidance.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_003, TRT: 3:31:24 ?

Lilia Abron attended Porter Elementary School for first grade and Manassas Elementary School for second through fourth grades. Although she was a sickly child, she managed to excel in school and enjoyed geography. In the fifth grade, Abron entered Hamilton School, where she continued through high school. She talks about her family's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement during her high school years, as well as her high school experience. Upon graduating from high school tenth in her class in 1962, Abron enrolled in Lemoyne-Owen College in Memphis, Tennessee, where she pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and started a drill team.

Elementary schools--Tennessee.

Sick children.

Civil rights movements--Tennessee--History--20th century.

African American high school students--Tennessee--Memphis.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:21 ?

Lilia Abron enrolled at Lemoyne Owen College in 1962. The historically black

college attracted famous visitors like B.B. King, Phineas Newborn, Ruby Dee, and David “Smokey” Gaines. While at Lemoyne, Abron became a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Although Abron was initially interested in studying biology and pursuing a career in medicine, she decided to switch her major to chemistry after realizing that she could not harm animals in her biology lab. Abron talks about her professors and mentors, including her English professor, Dr. Williamson, who encouraged her to apply to graduate school. In 1966, Abron began a fellowship at Washington University, where she studied sanitary engineering.

LeMoyne-Owen College--Alumni and alumnae.

African American universities and colleges.

Biology--Study and teaching.

Laboratory animals--Moral and ethical aspects.

Mentoring in education--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:31 ?

Lilia Abron received her M.S. degree in sanitation engineering from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri in 1968. She continued her graduate studies at the University of Iowa towards a Ph.D. degree in chemical engineering. Her dissertation research focused on using reverse osmosis in detecting organic compounds in drinking water. She talks about the implications of her research and the misconceptions about tap water and bottled water. After receiving her Ph.D. degree, Abron taught undergraduate and graduate students at Tennessee State University and Vanderbilt University. Abron moved to Washington, D.C. in 1975 and began teaching at Washington Technical Institute. In 1976, Abron taught at Howard University. She talks about how her experience there altered the trajectory of her career, as well as the challenges facing black women in STEM professions.

Engineering students--United States.

Reverse osmosis process (Water purification).

Universities and colleges--Faculty.

Howard University.

Minorities in science--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_006, TRT: 6:31:11 ?

Lilia Abron met her husband while working at Tennessee State University and they married in 1974. In 1978, Abron founded PEER Consultants with environmental engineer, Dr. Leon Weinberger, and her graduate school mentor, Dr. Liu-Hing. The company focuses on pollution, the environment, and energy resources nationally and internationally. Her first major contracts were with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Energy (DOE). In 1994, Abron started PEER Africa, which worked extensively in South Africa on projects to enhance sustainability, ecologically friendly tourism, and positive economic development. Abron received the Small Business Environmental Restoration Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Defense in 1996. She talks about environmental racism, the future of PEER and her post-career plans.

Environmental engineering.

PEER Consultants.

United States. Environmental Protection Agency.

Sustainability and the environment--South Africa.

Environmental protection--Awards--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_007, TRT: 7:28:31 ?

Lelia Abron founded PEER Consultants in 1978 in Washington, D.C. after leaving Howard University. The business provides professional environmental management services for the restoration, maintenance, and enhancement of the physical environment. In 1995, she co-founded PEER Africa with her business partner, Douglas Guy. Abron talks about her business partner, her consulting projects and work nationally and in Africa, and her projections for PEER. She also reflects on her career and legacy and talks about the challenges of owning a business.

PEER Consultants.

Joint ventures.

Environmental management--Forecasting.

Social responsibility of business--Africa.

African American business enterprises.

Video Oral History Interview with Lilia Abron, Section A2012\_113\_001\_008, TRT: 8:23:16 ?

Lilia Abron talks about her family and how she would like to be remembered. She also describes her photos.

African American families.

Photographs.