

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Donaldson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Donaldson, James A., 1941-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson,
Dates:	March 28, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:51:21).
Abstract:	Mathematician James Donaldson (1941 - 2019) served as the chairman of the the Howard University Department of Mathematics where he established the first Ph.D. degree-granting mathematics program at a Historically Black College and University. Donaldson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 28, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_087
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mathematician James A. Donaldson was born in April 17, 1941 on a farm in Madison County, Florida as one of eleven children to parents Audrey Brown and Oliver Donaldson. After graduating from high school, Donaldson enrolled at Lincoln University near Oxford, Pennsylvania in 1957 and graduated from there in 1961 with his A.B. degree in mathematics. Donaldson continued his studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where he received his M.S. degree in mathematics in 1963, and his Ph.D. degree in mathematics in 1965.

Upon graduation, Donaldson served as professor of mathematics at Southern University, Howard University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of New Mexico. In addition, Donaldson was appointed as a visiting professor at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Science at the University of Victoria in Canada, the University of Ferrara in Italy, and Duke University in North Carolina. In 1972, Donaldson was named chairman of Howard University Department of Mathematics. During his tenure there, Donald oversaw the hiring of new tenured-faculty and the development and inauguration of the first Ph.D. degree-granting mathematics program at a Historically Black College and University.

Donaldson has served on committees of several professional mathematics and science organizations. He is a member of the Council of the American Mathematical Society, served as the second vice president of the Mathematical Association of America, and was the editor of the newsletter of the National Association of Mathematicians. Donaldson's research interests include the history of mathematics and mathematics accessibility issues and he has published more than fifty research papers, articles and presentations in these areas as well.

Donaldson served as a consultant to the National Science Foundation, the National Research Council, the Sloan Foundation, the Educational Testing Service, several state boards of Education, many mathematics departments, and the District of Columbia Public School System. He received the Lincoln University Alumni Achievement

Award in 1986, and was the National Institute of Science's memorial lecturer in 1989.

James A. Donaldson was interviewed by *March 28, 2013*.

Donaldson passed away on October 18, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Donaldson was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 28, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Mathematician James Donaldson (1941 - 2019) served as the chairman of the the Howard University Department of Mathematics where he established the first Ph.D. degree-granting mathematics program at a Historically Black College and University.

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:

Donaldson, James A., 1941-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Donaldson, James A., 1941- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Mathematician

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 James Donaldson, March 28, 2013. 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 James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_001, TRT: 1:28:48

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James Donaldson describes his family background. His mother, Audrey Brown, was born in April of 1907 in the vicinity of Brooks County, Georgia and Madison County, Florida. She attended school up through the seventh grade before she became a homemaker. His father, Oliver Donaldson, was born around 1894 in Madison County, Florida. He was raised on his family farm, and continued to work there after completing the second grade. Donaldson was born on a farm in April of 1941 in Madison County, Florida, and has ten siblings. He talks about his parents' and his uncle's influence on his upbringing and his early education, and describes his childhood memories.

African American families--Florida.

Family farms--Florida--Madison County.

Uncles--Family relationships.

Childhood--Florida--1940-1950.

Farm life--Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_002, TRT: 2:30:06
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James Donaldson continues talking about his early childhood memories of growing up in Madison County, Florida. In 1947, he attended Jeslamb Elementary School, where he studied through the eighth grade. Jeslamb School was associated with the Jeslamb African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church that his family attended. Donaldson skipped two grades at Jeslamb School before he entered Madison County Training School in 1953. While he considers his teachers to have been well qualified and his education to be of good quality, the resources available to his school were feeble. Donaldson talks about his favorite teachers, his academic performance, and his experience in high school.

Church schools--Florida--Madison County.

African American--Education--Florida.

Teachers--Florida--1940-1960.

African American high school students--Florida--1950-1970.

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_003, TRT: 3:29:30
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James Donaldson's father died of a brain aneurysm during his senior year of high school. Also during his senior year, Donaldson went to Washington, D.C. to attend the New Farmers of America organization's trip to meet U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson. Donaldson graduated valedictorian of his class from Madison County Training School in 1957. He recalls considering a career as an electrician; however, under the guidance of his math teacher, Juanita Miller, he decided to leave the South to attend Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where he received a scholarship. Donaldson's initial introduction to Lincoln was rather unfriendly because he was hazed upon his arrival. However his experience there improved, and he joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. Donaldson talks about his teachers and peers, his decision to major in math, and his decision to attend graduate school at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

African American high school students--Florida--1950-1970.

New Farmers of America.

Benson, Ezra Taft.

Lincoln University (Pa.)--Students.

College students--Hazing.

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_004, TRT: 4:28:44
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James Donaldson received his A.B. degree in mathematics from Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania in 1961. He then decided to pursue his graduate studies in mathematics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Donaldson recalls his experience with racism at Urbana-Champaign, where he encountered difficulties in finding a place to stay. His doctoral research focused on differential equations. He explains what differential equations are and how they are used to solve problems. He also talks about his peers from UIUC, notable African American alumni from UIUC, and other African American mathematicians.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign--Students, Black.

Discrimination in housing--Illinois.

Differential equations.

African American mathematicians.

Mathematics--Study and teaching (Higher).

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_005, TRT: 5:27:12
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James Donaldson attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) to pursue his graduate studies in mathematics. While he was there, he encountered numerous incidents of racial discrimination and prejudice. Donaldson talks about his experience working as a computer operator at UIUC's Computer Center. After receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1965, he was appointed as an assistant professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He left Howard after a year due to his difficulty in overcoming the conservative politics of the then president of the university. Donaldson then joined the faculty of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Five years later, while he was actively engaged in the Civil Rights Movement and Anti-War campaigns, he decided to leave UIC due to inadequate compensation. Before he officially departed from UIC, Donaldson pursued postdoctoral research on scattering theory at the University of New Mexico from 1969 to 1971.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Discrimination in education--Illinois.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--United States.

Howard University--Presidents.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Protest movements--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_006, TRT: 6:30:28
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James Donaldson rejoined the faculty at Howard University's department of mathematics in 1971. That same year, he was a founding member of the Association for Women in Mathematics. In 1972, Donaldson was appointed as chair of the Department of Mathematics by Howard's then president, James E. Cheek. Under Donaldson's guidance, the Department of Mathematics underwent a transformation that eventually would lead to the development of the first and only Ph.D. program in mathematics at an HBCU in 1976. Donaldson talks about the development of Howard's graduate programs, balancing his professional duties with his research activities, his mathematical teaching philosophy, and his organizational affiliations.

Howard University. Department of Mathematics--Faculty.

Howard University--College department heads.

African American universities and colleges--Doctor of philosophy degree--Mathematics.

Howard University--Graduate work.

African American mathematicians--Intellectual life--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_007, TRT: 7:30:57
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James Donaldson has served on the mathematics faculty at Howard University since 1971. During his time there, he has held visiting appointments at Duke University, New York University's Courant Institute of the Mathematical Sciences, the University of Ferrara in Italy, and the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. He has also served on the board of Lincoln University, DC-TransAfrica, the National Association of Mathematicians, and the Mathematical Association of America. Donaldson has maintained professional relationships with the Mathematical Association of America and the American Mathematical Society since becoming a member in 1964. He talks about his professional activities and describes his appointment as the dean of Howard University's College of Arts and Sciences.

Universities and colleges--Visiting teachers.

Mathematicians--Professional associations.

Howard University. College of Arts and Sciences--Deans (Education).

Video Oral History Interview with James Donaldson, Section A2013_087_001_008, TRT: 8:25:36
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James Donaldson was appointed as the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Howard University in 1999. His initiatives for Howard include implementing study abroad programs, getting undergraduate students involved with research, implementing a curriculum review process, and securing resources for the university. Donaldson was also involved in expanding the Afro-American Studies program at Howard. In 2000, Donaldson and his colleague, Richard J. Fleming, published 'Elbert F. Cox: An Early Pioneer' in the American Mathematical Monthly. Donaldson talks about his views on research, his hopes for the field of mathematics, his family, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Howard University. College of Arts and Sciences--Deans (Education).

African American universities and colleges--Planning--Washington (D.C.).

Foreign study.

Howard University. African Studies and Research Program.

Mathematics--Periodicals.