

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ketevi Assamagan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Assamagan, K.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan,
Dates:	April 12, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:29:15).
Abstract:	Physicist Ketevi Assamagan (1963 -) has worked on the cutting edge of physics research at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland and for the U.S. Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory. Assamagan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 12, 2013, in Upton, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_104
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Physicist Ketevi A. Assamagan was born in Port-Gentil, Gabon in West Africa on March 12, 1963. After graduating from high school, Assamagan attended the University of Benin in Togo, West Africa and earned his B.S. degree in physics and chemistry in 1985. Assamagan was then awarded an U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grant award to pursue higher education in the United States. He went on to graduate from Ball State University in 1989 with his M.S. degree in theoretical condensed matter physics and his Ph.D. degree in nuclear and particle physics from the University of Virginia in 1995.

After earning his Ph.D. degree, Assamagan became a postdoctoral research associate in the Jefferson Lab at Hampton University. There, he worked on a project called the spectrometer wire chamber, which helped gather information about light. Assamagan developed a system for the rotation and angular position of the spectrometer, which contributed to its data collection of certain properties of light. Assamagan remained at Hampton until 1998, when he took a position as a research associate at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. From 1998 to 2001, Assamagan worked with CERN's particle accelerator to find the Higgs Boson, a large elementary particle whose existence has not yet been proven. It is thought to play a role in how other elementary particles get their masses. In 2001, Assamagan was hired by the U.S. Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory where he works on a physics project called the ATLAS Project. In addition to his research in particle physics, Assamagan has also supervised and mentored both graduate and undergraduate students. Additionally, he helped to organize the African School of Fundamental Physics, an educational workshop funded in part by Brookhaven National Laboratory.

Assamagan is a member of the American Physics Society, the National Society of Black Physicist, and the African Physical Society. He is a recipient of the Brookhaven National Laboratory Outstanding Student Mentoring Award.

Assamagan lives and works in New York.

Physicist Ketevi A. Assamagan was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 12, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ketevi Assamagan was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 12, 2013, in Upton, New York, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Physicist Ketevi Assamagan (1963 -) has worked on the cutting edge of physics research at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland, and for the U.S. Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory.

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:

Assamagan, K.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Assamagan, K.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Brookhaven National Laboratory. Accelerator Department

Occupations:

Physicist

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 Keteve Assamagan, April 12, 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 Keteve Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_001, TRT: 1:28:34
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Keteve Assamagan slates the interview and lists his favorites. Assamagan was

born on March 12, 1963 in Port-Gentil, Gabon. His mother, Afiwa Geanne Nouho, was born in 1938 in Adjaha, Republic of Benin. Her father was a farmer and her mother was a market woman. Assamagan talks about the Fon, his mother's tribe. His father's side of the family left Ghana in 1669 to escape the slave trade and settled in Togo. Assamagan discusses the slave trade in West Africa. Assamagan's father, Koumou Alphonse Assamagan, was born in 1935 in Djeta, Togo. His grandfather, Kete, was a farmer and his grandmother, Donsi, was a market woman.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_002, TRT: 2:29:51
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Ketevi Assamagan talks about his father, Koumou Alphonse Assamagan, who was an auto mechanic, a trade he learned in the 1950s, and worked for Office Togolais des Phosphates, the state mining company of Togo. After his father and mother, Afiwa Geanne Nouho, had married according to the Fon tradition, they decided to get married in the Catholic church as well and were the first in their town to do so. Assamagan describes the Fon religion and Voodoo, comparing these faiths to Catholicism and Christianity. He also shares a West African parable. Assamagan remembers attending the colonial school in Togo and being beaten by the teacher, an event that left a scar.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_003, TRT: 3:28:06
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Ketevi Assamagan describes Djeta, the village in Togo where he grew up. He shares the sights, sounds, and smells there and talks about music in his culture. Assamagan attended Premier de Djeta, the local primary school, at the age of five where he failed the first grade. However, afterwards Assamagan was a good student who was interested in the natural sciences and in becoming a medical doctor. In 1971, when Assamagan was eight years old, his father, Koumou Alphonse Assamagan, was hired at the Office Togolais des Phosphates, the state mining company of Togo, which required the family to move. Assamagan stayed with his grandparents, Kete and Donsi Assamagan, so that he would not have to switch primary schools in order to be with this parents.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_004, TRT: 4:28:30
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In this tape Ketevi Assamagan describes his middle and high school education.

Because there was no schooling beyond the sixth grade in his hometown, Assamagan had to move to Aneho, Togo at the age of thirteen to attend the College D'Enseignement General. He spent a year living with a cousin and then began living on his own, renting a room in a house. Assamagan attended high school at Lycee de Zebevi in Aneho, where he remembers the mentorship of a Peace Corps mathematics teacher. He graduated from high school in 1982 and passed the university entrance exams. Assamagan discusses being left-handed in Togo, where he was discouraged from using his left hand. Assamagan also talks about Gnassingbe Eyadema, the president of Togo from 1967-2005.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_005, TRT: 5:28:13
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Ketevi Assamagan talks about his time at the University of Benin in Lome, Togo where he received a strong mathematical and theoretical background in physics, but because of a lack of facilities and instruments, he was not able to experience the work of a laboratory. Even though Assamagan was at the top of his class for all four of his years at the university, he did not receive a scholarship until his final year because he lacked societal connections needed. After graduating in 1985, Assamagan received a scholarship from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which required that he spend two years working as a physics teacher at a school run by the Togo minister of technical education. He then describes his transition from Togo to the United States, where he attended Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana for his master's degree in theoretical condensed matter physics.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_006, TRT: 6:38:24
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Ketevi Assamagan talks about his time as a graduate student at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. His master's thesis, 'The Understanding and Improvement of Solar Cells,' focused on increasing the efficiency of solar cells. Assamagan received his M.S. degree in 1989 and attended the University of Virginia for his doctoral degree. Assamagan's doctoral dissertation was on measurements of pion decay and his work focused on reducing the uncertainty of measurements by a factor of eight. Assamagan received his doctoral degree in 1995 and became a postdoctoral fellow at Hampton University. His postdoctoral research centered around increasing the precision of the measurements of spectrometer positions. In 1998, Assamagan received a fellowship to work on the ATLAS project, a particle physics experiment at the Large Hadron Collider, for the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. Assamagan also describes the Higgs boson.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_007, TRT: 7:28:21
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Ketevi Assamagan explains how a particle accelerator works. In 1998, Assamagan obtained a fellowship at the European Organization for Nuclear Research where he became involved in the ATLAS project, a collaborative series of experiments in nuclear physics. Assamagan was hired in 2001 by Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York, where he stayed involved in the ATLAS project. He also contributed to the creation of the muon spectrometer for the ATLAS detector. In 2003, Assamagan became the convener of the Higgs boson working group at Brookhaven National Laboratory and the coordinator of the ATLAS Physics Analysis Tools from 2004 to 2007. After his work on the ATLAS Physics Analysis Tools, Assamagan researched the issue of pile-up in accelerators, where data from several collisions would be recorded simultaneously and thereby distort the analysis.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_008, TRT: 8:28:26
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Ketevi Assamaga talks about being a professor in South Africa, where he taught at the University of Cape Town in 2008 and the University of Johannesburg in 2012. From 2008 to 2010, Assamagan was the Higgs Working Group Convener for the ATLAS experiment. During that time, there was an explosion in the Large Hadron Collider at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) and the accelerator had to be shut down for a year and a half. In 2012, CERN announced that it had discovered a Higgs-like particle. Assamagan talks about that discovery and the certainty of the data. Assamagan also describes the Large Hadron Collider, CERN's nuclear accelerator in Geneva, Switzerland, and the amount of data that is processed from its collisions.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_009, TRT: 9:29:18
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Ketevi Assamagan describes the research of the ATLAS project, which include examining the phenomena of dark matter, dark energy, and antimatter. In addition to working on the ATLAS project, Assamagan is a member of a group that establishes schools of fundamental physics in Africa. He helped organize a school in South Africa in 2010 and one in Ghana in 2012, and in 2014, a third school will be established in Senegal. Assamagan has also been involved in mentoring students both in Africa and in the United States. He talks about his family and reflects on his life and legacy. Assamagan also shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

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Video Oral History Interview with Ketevi Assamagan, Section A2013_104_001_010, TRT:
10:01:32 ?

Ketevi Assamagan talks about how he would like to be remembered.

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