Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Welton Ivan Taylor

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Creator: Taylor, Welton Ivan

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor,

Dates: March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003

Bulk Dates: 2003

Physical Description: 14 Betacam SP videocassettes (6:46:45).

Abstract: Bacteriologist Welton Ivan Taylor (1919 - 2012) discovered that antibiotics can treat tetanus and gas gangrene. Taylor was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2003_056

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

A descendant of President Zachary Taylor, world-renowned scientist and educator Welton I. Taylor was born in Birmingham, Alabama on November 12, 1919. Shortly after his birth, Taylor's family moved to Chicago, where his performance at DuSable High School inspired local African Americans to sponsor his undergraduate education in bacteriology at the University of Illinois. Taylor served in the first all-African American division to enter into combat in World War II; the G.I. Bill enabled him to return to his alma mater to earn his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in bacteriology.

Taylor was appointed bacteriology instructor at the University of Illinois in 1948; he promptly discovered that common antibiotics could treat gas gangrene and tetanus, dangerous conditions that affected war victims. In 1954, the Chicago meatpacking firm Swift & Company recruited Taylor to tackle an outbreak of salmonella poisoning in baby food; he standardized his successful approach to this problem and exported it to labs worldwide. In subsequent years Taylor helped Chicago-area hospitals, healthcare organizations, and government agencies, address an array of health problems. On a sojourn abroad from 1961 to 1962, Taylor collaborated with prestigious British and French scientists. Upon returning to the University of Illinois, Taylor developed methods of bacteria detection that the Food and Drug Administration relies on today. In 1985, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta named a bacterium, "Enterobacter taylorae", in honor of Taylor and a British colleague.

Taylor received numerous awards and grants, and his prodigious list of publications has been a continual source of influence scientists. In 1960, Taylor founded the Chicago chapter of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, which he remained very active in. Taylor also welcomed opportunities to lecture on recent health issues that concerned him, such as increases in STDs and HIV. Taylor and his wife, Jayne, whom he married in 1945, raised two daughters, Karyn and Shelley.

Welton Taylor passed away on November 1, 2012.
**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Welton Ivan Taylor was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 14 Betacam SP videocassettes. Bacteriologist Welton Ivan Taylor (1919 - 2012) discovered that antibiotics can treat tetanus and gas gangrene.

**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:**

Taylor, Welton Ivan, 1919-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Taylor, Welton Ivan, 1919---Interviews

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 7/11/2013 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, March 27, 2003 and May 15, 2003

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2003/03/27

Welton Ivan Taylor begins by detailing his family history and his ancestors on both sides of his family, explaining his multiethnic heritage. Taylor tells of his genealogical research, which allowed him to discover his family history. He also describes his family's migration from Alabama to Chicago, which were prompted by threats from the Ku Klux Klan. His mother Cora Lee Brewer was born on February 2, 1880 in Florence, Alabama to the famous Brewer family. The family was of Cherokee Indian, Irish, African and German descent. She was one of fifteen children, five of which died early on. Her parents names were Buchanan and Millie Brewer. Taylor's father was was born on July 27,1887. He was the first African American to own a business in Downtown Birmingham, Alabama-- a tailor shop called "Taylor the Tailor". His father was the tailor and his mother worked in the shop as a seamstress.
Welton Ivan Taylor remembers his cousin, famed blues songwriter W. C. Handy. He describes the challenges his parents faced after they moved from Alabama to Chicago, including the Great Depression. He vividly recounts the Chicago race riot of 1919, which occurred a few months before his birth. Taylor explains how two of his relatives were nearly beaten to death. Taylor then shares examples of how his father's advice helped him as a child.

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls growing up in Chicago and in Peoria, Illinois, where his family moved during the Depression. Taylor compares his experience in the two cities. He explains that he moved back to Chicago to attend DuSable High School, where Timuel Black and Dempsey Travis were classmates of his. He remembers his early interest in science and nature, and shares his college aspirations. Taylor explains how members of the African American community sponsored his education at the University of Illinois.

Welton Ivan Taylor details the scientific contributions of his idol, Louis Pasteur, and explains the sciences of microbiology and bacteriology, which he studied at the University of Illinois. He then recalls his participation in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) while at Illinois, and explains the process that led to his promotion to second lieutenant.

Welton Ivan Taylor details his experiences as the only black officer at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He was confronted with many instances of racism and discrimination.
in the Army, including segregated railcars and officers who did want to command black troops. Taylor also discusses everyday life on the army base and recalls his introduction to aviation.

African American soldiers.

Fort Sill (Okla.).

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Segregation in transportation.

Airplanes--Piloting.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_006, TRT: 0:29:25 2003/03/27

Welton Ivan Taylor continues to discuss the racism and discrimination he experienced in the U.S. Army. He also speaks about how he overcame it. Taylor successfully suggested to his commanding officer that an old abandoned barracks building on base be remodeled into a post exchange (PX) and recreational building. In this way, African American soldiers could avoid the hostile racism of army life in Lawton, Oklahoma. He recounts that the recreational room was so popular that it became integrated instantly. When Taylor was transferred to Fort Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan, he received a bad report which prevented him from getting a promotion. However, the commanding officer who gave Taylor the rating was forced to change it. This allowed Taylor to be promoted to first lieutenant.

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Yellow fever--Prevention.

Hepatitis B--Diagnosis.

Military promotions.

Fort Custer (Mich.).

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_007, TRT: 0:29:50 2003/03/27

Welton Ivan Taylor continues to describe his service in the U.S. Army, highlighting his intelligence training at Fort Custer, Michigan, and recalling the completion of his pilot's training. He explains why he chose to fly in combat overseas rather than remaining a flight instructor at home. Taylor also recalls his transfer to Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

Fort Custer (Mich.).

Military intelligence--United States--Study and teaching.

Discrimination in public accommodations--United States.

Airplanes--Piloting.

Discrimination in the military--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_001_008, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/03/27

Welton Ivan Taylor details his experiences overseas during World War II, sharing his observations of the Battle of Guadalcanal. He explains how he flew reconnaissance missions at Guadalcanal and recounts a visit from famed pilot, Charles Lindbergh. Taylor talks about how his interest in photography landed him in trouble with a superior officer. He also recalls how he challenged the existence of segregated facilities for officers.


Guadalcanal, Battle of, Solomon Islands, 1942-1943
Welton Ivan Taylor recalls his adventures flying in Papua New Guinea during World War II, detailing his non-combat missions and his favorite planes to fly. He then recounts his return home to the states, where he married his wife Jayne (née) Kemp in 1945. Taylor then explains attending the University of Illinois for graduate school under the G.I. Bill. Taylor describes his living situation and recalls how he and his wife worked to end discrimination and segregation on campus.

Air pilots, Military.
Papua New Guinea.
Veterans--Education--Law and legislation--United States.
African American veterans--Education (Higher).
University of Illinois at Chicago. Graduate College.
College students--Political activity--Illinois.

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls earning his Ph.D. in bacteriology from the University of Illinois in June of 1948-- despite the objections of a racist professor. He then recounts his early career as a microbiologist for the University of Illinois Medical School, and describes the incident where he cemented his reputation for doing anything to help a patient. Taylor then goes on to explain why he accepted a position at Swift and Company, where he investigated an outbreak of salmonella at one of the meatpacking company's plants.

Microbiology--Study and teaching (Higher).
Racism in higher education--United States.
College of Medicine at Chicago.
Swift & Company--Employees.
Salmonella food poisoning.

Welton Ivan Taylor recalls his career with the meatpacking company, Swift & Company from 1954-1959 and tells of his work investigating outbreaks of salmonella and other bacterial contamination in baby food and meat. He then discusses why he left the company.

Swift & Company.
Salmonella food poisoning.
Meat--Microbiology.
Food--Pasteurization.

Welton Ivan Taylor explains how he developed innovative methods to clean up bacterial contamination at the meatpacking firm, Swift and Company; and prevent new ones from occurring by improving handling and packing standards.
He then explains his opportunity to study and work at the Pasteur Institute in Lille, France and the Central Public Health Laboratory in Colindale, England for the World Health Organization. He tells of his groundbreaking work in microbiology, including discovering a new organism that was named after him. He recounts his experiences living in Europe, focusing on him and his daughters' learning of the French language, and his family's home in London.

Meat-packing industry--Standards.
World Health Organization.
Institut Pasteur Lille (France).
African American families--Europe.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_013, TRT: 0:28:20 2003/05/15

Welton Ivan Taylor shares his thoughts on the history of racism and segregation in the military. He also shares his thoughts on the contemporary state of race relations, which he believes will always be in flux. Finally, Taylor reflects back on his life and career; discussing his faith, his travels abroad in Europe and Africa, and discussing his plans for the future.

Discrimination in the military--United States--History.
United States--Armed Forces--African Americans--Segregation--History.
International travel.

Video Oral History Interview with Welton Ivan Taylor, Section A2003_056_002_014, TRT: 0:24:45 2003/05/15

Welton Ivan Taylor shares personal photographs of himself and his family. Many of the images document his military service as a soldier and pilot during World War II-- in addition to his education at the University of Illinois. Other images shown include those of him and his father, Frederick Enslen; his older sister, Mary Blanche (née Taylor) Cook; his wife, Jayne (née Kemp) Taylor and one of the couple's daughters as a child.

Photograph collections.
African American families.