Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers ® Video Oral History with Walter E. Massey

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Massey, Walter E.

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey,

Dates: March 13, 2002

Bulk Dates: 2002

Physical Description: 9 Betacam SP videocassettes (4:15:54).

Abstract: College president and physicist Walter E. Massey (1938 - ) was president of Morehouse College for twelve years before becoming president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010. He has served as the director of Argonne National Laboratory and the National Science Foundation and was a physics professor at the University of Illinois, Brown University, and the University of Chicago. Massey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 13, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2002_023

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

College president and physicist Walter E. Massey was born on April 5, 1938 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He was raised by his step-father, Almar Cleveland Massey, and mother, Essie Nelson Massey. Segregated society made life difficult for him and his family but his parents raised him with the mentality to stay safe, be proud, and deal with discrimination. During the tenth grade at Royal Street High School, Massey was awarded a full scholarship after taking a Ford Foundation exam and he skipped the rest of high school to attend Morehouse College. Under the tutelage of his mentor, Professor Sabinus H. Christensen, he fell in love with physics his first semester and earned his B.S. degree in 1958. Christensen, encouraged him to attend Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri for graduate school. Massey earned his Ph.D. degree in physics at Washington University in 1966.

After graduate school, Massey briefly worked at Argonne National Laboratory before becoming a physics professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was one of only four or five black professors out of the 3,000-member faculty, and he participated in every black faculty and student association. Massey left Illinois to teach at Brown University where he created the Inner City Teachers of Science program and eventually became dean of the College at Brown. After ten years, Massey left Brown to become the director of Argonne National Laboratory in 1979. Argonne was operated by the University of Chicago where Massey was also a physics professor. After management reform at Argonne, he became the first black vice president for research between 1984 and 1991. Massey was the founding chairman of the University of Chicago Development Corporation and served in that capacity from 1986 to 1991. In 1991, he was appointed as the director of the National Science Foundation, where he served until 1993. Massey was appointed as provost and vice president for academic affairs for the University of California system and its three national laboratories in 1993. Massey returned to Morehouse College, his alma mater, but this time in 1995 as college president. Massey was president at Morehouse until 2007, and in 2010 became president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.
Massey has always been committed to expanding opportunities for minorities in science education. He sat on the President's Council of Advisors, Science and Technology (PCAST) under both President George H.W. Bush and President George W. Bush. Massey has been awarded more than twenty honorary doctorates and numerous awards for excellence in teaching. He has been active in several professional organizations, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Massey has also been active in a number of civic, cultural, and community organizations. His wife is Shirley Anne Massey, and he has two sons, Keith Barnett Anthony Massey and Eric Eugene Massey.

Walter Massey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 13, 2002.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Walter E. Massey was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 13, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 9 Betacam SP videocassettes. College president and physicist Walter E. Massey (1938 - ) was president of Morehouse College for twelve years before becoming president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010. He has served as the director of Argonne National Laboratory and the National Science Foundation and was a physics professor at the University of Illinois, Brown University, and the University of Chicago.

**Restrictions**

**Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

**Restrictions on Use**

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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.

**Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Persons:**

Massey, Walter E.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)
Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

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**Organizations:**

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

- EducationMakers
- 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 7/10/2013 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).
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, March 13, 2002**

Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_001, TRT: 0:24:17 2002/03/13

Walter Massey briefly describes his collection of photographs, which include images of his commencement ceremony and initiation into Omega Psi Phi Fraternity at Morehouse College; Massey and the American Academy of Achievement's Gold Plate Award recipient, Ruth Simmons, President of Brown University; and him with former U.S. Presidents Jimmy Carter, George Bush and Bill Clinton—during his directorship of the Argonne National Laboratory and the National Science Foundation. Other photographs shown feature Massey with friend and Nobel Peace Prize winner, physicist, Leon Max Lederman; Massey's various supervisors during employment at Argonne National Laboratory, and images of his wife and family.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).
Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.
Argonne National Laboratory.
Presidents--American.
Lederman, Leon M.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_002, TRT: 0:30:09 2002/03/13

Walter E. Massey was born on April 5, 1938 in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He was raised by his step-father, Almar Cleveland Massey, and mother, Essie Nelson Massey. His step-father was from Perkinston, Mississippi and worked at the Hercules Powder Company after serving in the U.S. Army. Massey's mother was very intelligent and worked as a school teacher and principal. His mother had many hobbies and vocations on the side. Massey remembers the sights, smells, and sounds of pecan trees, wood peckers, and sugar cane from his childhood. Segregated society made life difficult for him and his family. Massey remembers how the police shot his family’s dog. His parents raised him with a good mentality to stay safe, be proud, and deal with discrimination. Though he sometimes played hooky from elementary school, Massey loved to read and learn. He wanted to explore the United States and enjoyed visiting relatives around the country.

African American families--Mississippi.
Hercules Powder Company.
Hattiesburg (Miss.).
Segregation--Mississippi.
Police brutality.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_003, TRT: 0:31:06 2002/03/13

Walter E. Massey enjoyed doing math problems during elementary school. During high school, he was more interested in music than math or science. He
played the alto saxophone with his friends in their band, the Blue Gardenias, at local clubs. Massey took a Ford Foundation exam during tenth grade and he was awarded a full scholarship and skipped the rest of high school and attended Morehouse College. He wanted to go home when he first arrived at Morehouse because it seemed that the other boys were smarter than him. However, the placement exam results ranked him at number five or six out of ninety students. This gave Massey confidence in his abilities, and with supportive professors and classmates he began to excel academically. He fell in love with physics during his first course and worked hard to succeed in all of his classes.

Mathematical ability in children.
Ford Foundation--Education (Higher)--United States--Endowments.
Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).
Advanced placement programs (Education)--Examinations.
College students.

Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_004, TRT: 0:29:19 2002/03/13

Walter E. Massey remembers notable professors at Morehouse College such as Claude B. Dansby, Henry McBay, and his mentor Sabinus H. Christensen. Massey often spent time with Christensen and his wife at their home. He loves physics because it is a continual intellectual journey. Massey gave up the saxophone because band rehearsal was the same time as the physics laboratory. There were very few students studying physics, and often Massey was the only student in his class. After he graduated, Morehouse convinced him to stay in Atlanta to teach for one year. They sent him to Columbia University in New York City for physics classes over the summer. After teaching for one year, he attended Howard University on scholarship, but he did not feel challenged by their graduate program. With Christensen's help, he decided to transfer to Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri.

College teachers.
Physics--Study and teaching (Higher).
African American college students--Scholarships, fellowships, etc.
Washington University (Saint Louis, Mo.).

Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_005, TRT: 0:28:58 2002/03/13

Walter E. Massey was encouraged to finish his Ph.D. degree in 1966 at Washington University in Saint Louis by another mentor, Eugene Feenberg. Massey published articles in the prominent journal, "Physical Review Letters," during and after graduate school. He briefly worked at Argonne National Laboratory before becoming a physics professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was one of only four or five black professors out of the 3,000 member faculty, and he participated in every black faculty and student association. Dealing with non-stop racial issues and violence was intense, so Massey left Illinois with colleague Leo Kadanoff to teach at Brown University. In addition to teaching physics at Brown, he created the Inner City Teachers of Science program. Massey became dean of The College at Brown University. After ten years, he left Brown to become the director of Argonne National Laboratory in 1979.

Mentoring in science.
Doctor of philosophy degree.
Scientific publications.
Walter E. Massey became the director of Argonne National Laboratory in 1979. Argonne was operated by the University of Chicago where he was also a physics professor. As director, he was invited to socialize with those in high society and join their organizations. Massey soon found he was working and socializing with almost only white people. As a result, he became more involved with the black students and faculty at the University of Chicago, hosting them at dinners and gatherings. At Argonne, Massey simplified the complicated laboratory management system, refined his management style, and learned to gain support from politicians and groups to secure laboratory funding. He is proud that Argonne developed an advanced photon source, continued excellent nuclear energy research, and began a high school education outreach program while he was director and vice president of research. Argonne helped Massey gain a broader appreciation of science, engineering, and technology.

Promotions.
Argonne National Laboratory.
University of Chicago--Faculty.
Management & leadership skills.

Walter E. Massey explains the close proximity to Argonne National Laboratory allowed the Illinois utility company Commonwealth Edison to build some of the first nuclear reactors. Massey remembers the intense political debates because of the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents in 1979 and 1986 while he was at Argonne National Laboratory. He planned to leave Argonne and only teach at the University of Chicago, but he was nominated by President George H.W. Bush as the director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Massey, a Democrat, felt reluctant to join a Republican administration but found his interview and NSF work to be completely non-partisan. NSF funds science and mathematics research and is seen as the premier scientific agency by the academic community. At NSF, Massey observed a continual debate over how to invest federal funds for science research and whether scientific research should also address societal problems.

Commonwealth Edison Company.
Nuclear reactor accidents.
National Science Foundation (U.S.).
National Science Foundation (U.S.)--Appropriations and expenditures.
Science--Social aspects--United States.

Walter E. Massey describes the fortuitous set of circumstances which arose and allowed him to pass up the chance to be president of the huge University of California system and instead return to his alma mater, Morehouse College.

University of California (System)--Job vacancies.
Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.)--Presidents.
Video Oral History Interview with Walter E. Massey, Section A2002_023_001_009, TRT: 0:20:20
2002/03/13

Walter E. Massey discusses his legacy.