

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Early

PERSON

Early, James Counts

Alternative Names: James Early;

Life Dates: January 12, 1947-

Place of Birth: Ocala, Florida, USA

Residence: Washington, D.C.

Work: Washington, D.C.

Occupations: Cultural Heritage Administrator; Folklorist

Biographical Note

Cultural educator James Counts Early was born in Ocala, Florida, on January 12, 1947. Early studied Spanish at Morehouse College in Atlanta, earning his B.A. in 1969. He also spent a year studying in Panama at the Canal Zone College. After graduation, Early attended Howard University, where he received his M.A. degree in 1971, and then studied for his Ph.D. degree. While there, he also attended Georgetown University, where he studied Portuguese at the Advanced Portuguese Institute.

During his years as a student, Early worked a number of jobs that helped to shape his career. At the Martin Luther King Center, he worked in the archives and then from 1970 to 1971 as an administrative and research assistant to the director of the Institute of the Black World. In 1973, he went to work at the Smithsonian Institute as a folklore consultant and researcher. He was promoted in 1974 to the acting administrator until 1976. That year, he became an associate professor at Antioch College in Washington, D.C., and worked in research at Howard University's Institute for the Arts and Humanities. In 1978, Early became the producer, writer and host of Ten Minutes Left, a weekly radio show on WHUR-FM. He hosted this program for five years while working at the National Endowment for the Humanities as the humanist administrator. He worked at NEH until 1984 when he returned to the Smithsonian Institute to work as the executive assistant to the assistant secretary for public service. Since then, he has held a variety of positions including working as the assistant provost for educational and cultural programs; director of cultural studies and communication at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies; and director of cultural heritage policy at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

Active in many organizations, Early served on the founding steering committee of the International Network for Cultural Diversity and was the humanities coordinator of the Trans-Africa Afro Americans and Cuba Cultural Conversation Project in 2000. He has served on the board of directors of the Children's Studio School since 1993, and since 1995 on the National Black Program Consortium, a program that funds independent black filmmakers. Early is a renaissance man. He writes on the politics of culture, lectures internationally and works with those in prison. Skilled with languages, Early is fluent in Spanish, can converse in Portuguese, reads French and has some knowledge of Mandarin Chinese.

Related Entries

Hampton, Altobelle [CHILD_OF]
Mother

James Hampton, Lizzy [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Maternal Grandmother

Lee Counts, Harry [GRANDCHILD_OF]
Maternal Grandfather

Tweetie Early, James [CHILD_OF]
Father

Lucy Moten Training School [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Morehouse College [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Howard University [STUDENT_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Howard University Institute for the Arts and Humanities [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from ? to ?]

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from ? to 1984]

Humanist Administrator

Smithsonian Institute [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Assistant Provost for Educational and Cultural Programs

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage [EMPLOYEE_OF]
[from ? to ?]

Director of Cultural Studies and Communication

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

Director of Cultural Heritage Policy

Institute of the Black World [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1970 to 1971]

Administrative and Research Assistant to the Director

Smithsonian Institute [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1973 to ?]

Folklore Consultant and Researcher

Smithsonian Institute [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1996 to 1996]

Acting Administrator

Antioch College [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1976 to ?]

Associate Professor

WHUR Radio [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 2007 to ?]

Producer, Writer and Host

Smithsonian Institute [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1984 to ?]

Executive Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Public Service