

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with S. Allen Counter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Counter, S. Allen
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with S. Allen Counter,
Dates:	December 8, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:49:51).
Abstract:	Educator, neurophysiologist, and african diaspora ethnographer S. Allen Counter (1954 - 2017) was the director of the Harvard Foundation. He earned his Ph.D. degree in neurobiology from Case Western Reserve University, and was involved in ethnographic and scientific studies around the world. Counter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 8, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_258
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator, African diaspora ethnographer, and neurophysiologist S. Allen Counter, Jr. was born on July 8, 1954 to Samuel Counter, Sr. and Ann Johnson Counter. Counter graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1972, and went on to earn his B.S. degree in biology and audiological sciences from Tennessee State University in 1976. After earning his his Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in 1979, and completing his postgraduate studies in neurobiology at Harvard University, Counter was appointed to the faculty of the biology department at

Harvard.

Counter was promoted to the position of associate professor of biology, and in 1981 was appointed professor of neurology at the Harvard Medical School. Counter then earned his Doctor of Medical Science degree from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden in 1989. As a neurophysiologist, Counter conducted research on nerve and muscle physiology, auditory physiology and neurophysiological diagnosis of brain injuries in children and adults. Counter's scientific research also focused on the neurobiological effects of lead and mercury exposure, magnetic resonance imaging of the inner ear, balancing systems and multiple sclerosis.

Counter also pursued his secondary academic interest, African American ethnography, during the 1970s. He conducted ethnographic studies among the indigenous people of Surinam, South America. Counter's research resulted in a series of major articles, which appeared in national and international periodicals and an award-winning documentary on the culture and history of the African rain forest people entitled, "I Shall Moulder Before I Shall Be Taken."

While conducting research in Greenland in 1986, Counter met the eighty-year-old Inuit sons of the North Pole co-discoverers, Rear Admiral Robert E. Peary and Matthew Henson. Counter organized and raised the funds to bring Anaukaq Henson, Kali Peary and their families to the United States to meet their American relatives in 1987. Counter sought proper recognition for Henson's contributions to Arctic exploration and co-discovery of the North Pole in 1909, and his work led to Henson's body being moved from his grave in the Bronx, New York, to the Arlington National Cemetery, and the U.S. Navy commissioning a U.S.N.S. oceanographic explorer ship named in Henson's honor.

In 1993, Counter initiated research studies in the interior of Ecuador, South America, where he discovered a unique group of African descendants living high in the Andes; he later produced a documentary film on these descendants of eighteenth century slaves entitled, "Lost Africans in the Andes." From 1993 to 2000, Counter led medical teams into the Ecuadorian mountains to study health problems and provide medical services; he also conducted research to reduce the severe lead and mercury poisoning found amongst the children working in the ceramics glazing industry and gold mining areas of Ecuador.

In 1980, Counter served as the founding director of The Harvard Foundation. In addition to his professional activities, Counter lectured in classrooms and on television programs to increase scientific literacy among young people.

Counter passed away on July 12, 2017.

S. Allen Counter was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 8, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with S. Allen Counter was conducted by Robert Hayden on December 8, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Educator, neurophysiologist, and african diaspora ethnographer S. Allen Counter (1954 - 2017) was the director of the Harvard Foundation. He earned his Ph.D. degree in neurobiology from Case Western Reserve University, and was involved in ethnographic and scientific studies around the world.

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:

Counter, S. Allen

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghilea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Counter, S. Allen--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Neurophysiologist

African Diaspora Ethnographer

Educator

HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers|EducationMakers

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 S. Allen Counter, December 8, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 S. Allen Counter, Section
A2005_258_001_001, TRT: 0:30:21 2005/12/08

S. Allen Counter describes his family background, beginning with his mother, Anne Johnson Counter. She was born in Americas, Georgia. Her parents, Edie Nelms and John Johnson, relocated the family to Lantana, Florida after she was born. Counter's mother was a nurse and

nursing instructor and his father, Samuel Counter, Sr., served in World War II, dying shortly after of a heart attack. Counter's paternal grandfather, Reverend Counter, was a prominent figure in the African American Methodist Episcopal church. Counter discusses his family's values, which emphasized religion and education, and his exposure to different cultures such as the Seminoles in Florida. Counter talks about his two siblings, Jean Counter Powell and Timothy Counter and recalls stories about growing up on the grounds of the tuberculosis health center where his mother worked.

World War, 1939-1945.

African American Methodists.

Tuberculosis.

African Americans--Diseases.

Seminole Indians.

African American families.

Video Oral History Interview with S. Allen Counter, Section A2005_258_001_002, TRT: 0:30:49 2005/12/08

S. Allen Counter describes his upbringing in Boynton Beach, Florida. At the age of six, Counter participated in a civil rights protest at a segregated beach. During that time, beaches were largely unavailable to African American residents and they were relegated to swimming in area swamps. He describes having a normal family life as a child, with church-centered activities and sports.

Counter's family was poor, but his grandmother provided them with books and his mother provided them with enriching activities. Counter also discusses attending Boynton Colored Elementary School, which later became Poinciana Elementary School. Though the school had limited resources compared to white elementary schools, Counter's proximity to Cape Canaveral, and access to a science teacher who encouraged him to explore science, helped develop his early interests.

Racism--Florida--History.

Segregation--Florida.

Civil rights movements--Florida.

Science--Social aspects--Forecasting.

Segregation in education--Florida.

Video Oral History Interview with S. Allen Counter, Section
A2005_258_002_003, TRT: 0:29:27

S. Allen Counter describes attending Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State University in Nashville, Tennessee, graduate school at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio and his research as a post doc at Harvard University. Counter attended Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University from 1972 to 1976, where he studied biology and sensory physiology. Counter went on to study electrophysiology at Case Western University, earning his Ph.D. degree in 1979. While at Harvard, Counter studied in the Neurophysiology lab under John Dowling. Counter discusses studying auditory neuroscience under Dr. Ake Flock in Sweden, during which he earned his doctor of medical science degree from the Karolinska Institute. During the 1970s and 1980s, Counter also ran a lead and mercury study of pregnant women and children in Mexico and South America and worked with Massachusetts General Hospital. Counter then discusses his documentary, "I Shall Mold it Before I Shall Be Taken," and his expedition to the North Pole.

Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University--
Students.

Harvard University--20th century.

Case Western Reserve University.

Video Oral History Interview with S. Allen Counter, Section
A2005_258_002_004, TRT: 0:19:14

Counter talks about his scientific and social expedition to the North Pole in 1986 to investigate the history of its original discovery by Matthew Henson and Robert Peary. During the expedition, Henson and Peary each fathered a child who Counter was able to bring to the United States to meet their relatives. As a result of Counter's efforts, Henson's grave has been moved from a civilian cemetery to Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Counter then discusses his work as Director of the Harvard Foundation and his appointment as Counsel to Sweden in 2004 by the Swedish Ambassador. Counter

finishes by discussing his legacy and accomplishments.

Henson, Matthew Alexander, 1866-1955.

Arlington National Cemetery (Arlington, Va.)--African Americans.

Arctic regions--Discovery and exploration.