



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with E. Lee Lassiter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	E. Lee Lassiter
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter,
Dates:	July 16, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:24:00).
Abstract:	Newspaper columnist and journalism professor E. Lee Lassiter (1936 -) worked at the "Baltimore News-American" for twenty years, writing a nationally syndicated column for twelve of those years. He joined Coppin State University in 1986 as an associate professor of journalism and English before retiring in 2003. Lassiter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 16, 2010, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_070
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper columnist and journalism professor E. Lee Lassiter was born on July 11, 1936, in Carpenter, North Carolina. His father, Narvie Lassiter, was a tenant farmer while his mother, Margie Upchurch Lassiter, was a housewife and sold cosmetics. Lassiter's parents made a pact that all of their children would graduate from high school and, unlike most tenant farmers, insisted they attend school every day. Lassiter attended the segregated Apex Elementary School in Apex, North Carolina and Barry O'Kelly High School in Method, North Carolina, graduating in 1954. He worked his way through college at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in, receiving his B.A. degree in secondary education in 1959. He earned his M.A. degree in journalism from Boston University in 1963 and his Ed.D. degree from Morgan State University in 1993.

While a student at Tuskegee, Lassiter joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps. In 1961, he served in the Adjutant General's Corps of the Army as a correspondence officer and technical writer and remained in the Army Reserves for another ten years. Near the close of 1961, he joined the editorial staff at the "Baltimore Afro-American" newspaper before moving, in 1965, to the "Baltimore News-American," where he remained until the newspaper ceased operations in 1986. During his time at the "Baltimore News-American," Lassiter wrote editorials and worked in various positions in the editing department. In 1974, he became a regular columnist at the newspaper, with syndicated columns in newspapers around the nation. After the paper closed, Lassiter accepted a position as an associate professor of English at Coppin State University. He retired from teaching in 1999, and began working as a public relations associate for the University. In 2003, he retired from that position, but accepted a contract to work in the same capacity online from his home.

Lassiter is an active member of numerous associations, including the NAACP, the Baltimore Tuskegee Alumni

Association and the Black Writers' Guild of Maryland. He has been a member of Mount Ararat Baptist Church in Baltimore for forty-four years. Active in community service for almost forty years, among his numerous awards are the Tuskegee University Presidential Associate Award, African Methodist Episcopal Church Christian Service Award and the Council for Cultural Progress Public Service Award. In 1981, he was honored with a Giant in Journalism trophy. Lassiter lives in Baltimore with his wife, Hannah Louise Lassiter.

E. Lee Lassiter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 16, 2010.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with E. Lee Lassiter was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 16, 2010, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Newspaper columnist and journalism professor E. Lee Lassiter (1936 -) worked at the "Baltimore News-American" for twenty years, writing a nationally syndicated column for twelve of those years. He joined Coppin State University in 1986 as an associate professor of journalism and English before retiring in 2003.

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:

Lassiter, E. Lee

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Lassiter, E. Lee--Interviews.

African American journalists--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

African American college teachers--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Baltimore News-American

Coppin State University

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 E. Lee Lassiter, July 16, 2010. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/20/2011 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, July 16, 2010

Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter, Section A2010_070_001_001, TRT: 0:30:46
2010/07/16

E. Lee Lassiter describes his family, who had spent generations in North Carolina. His maternal grandmother, Bethenia Baker Upchurch, was a housewife who cared for her thirteen children while his grandfather, Claude Upchurch, was a tenant farm who owned his own livestock and tools, giving one-third of his crops to the landowner. Lassiter's mother, Margie Upchurch Lassiter, was born on October 27, 1915 in Chatham County, North Carolina. Although she dropped out of school in the fourth grade to work on the family farm, she stressed the importance of education to her son. Lassiter's paternal grandparents, Daisy Hackney Lassiter and Clarence Lassiter, were also tenant farmers who kept two-thirds of their crops. Lassiter's father, Narvie Lassiter, was born on January 21, 1909 in Chatham County, North Carolina. He worked as a mill hand and lived in a shanty town until becoming a tenant farmer upon his marriage.

African American families--North Carolina.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--North Carolina.

African American tenant farmers--North Carolina--Chatham.

African American grandparents--North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter, Section A2010_070_001_002, TRT: 0:27:20
2010/07/16

E. Lee Lassiter describes his childhood and family life in Carpenter, North Carolina with his seven siblings. Almost all of the tenant farmers were African American and were required to show deference to the mostly white landowners. Despite the hardships, Lassiter's parents made a pact that all of their children would graduate from high school and, unlike most tenant farmers, insisted they attend school every day. Even after working long days in the fields, Lassiter recalls that his parents reviewed their homework and attended Parent-Teacher Association meetings. Lassiter discusses 1930s and 1940s radio shows, "The Shadow," "Amos and Andy" and "The Lone Ranger." His family sometimes listened to their white neighbor's radio until the 1938 boxing match between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling, after which he never invited them back. Years later, Lassiter realized how important Joe Louis was as a symbol of hope for African Americans.

African American families--North Carolina--Carpenter.

African Americans--Social life and customs--North Carolina--Carpenter.

Race discrimination--North Carolina--Carpenter.

African American tenant farmers--North Carolina--Carpenter.

African Americans--Education--North Carolina--Carpenter.

Education--Parent participation--North Carolina--Carpenter.

African American parents.

Radio programs.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter, Section A2010_070_001_003, TRT: 0:28:25
2010/07/16

E. Lee Lassiter continues discussing radio programs, including “Amos 'n' Andy,” which he loved until he discovered that the characters were played by whites who were mocking African Americans. He describes the era's most popular magazines, such as "Life" and "Look," which fostered his love of reading and appreciation of beautiful photographs. He talks about his mother's business ventures, selling butter and eggs as well as being a saleswoman for Lucky Heart, a cosmetics company with products for African Americans. Lassiter then discusses his school years, when he was bused sixteen miles to the segregated Apex Elementary School. Aware of the sacrifices that their parents were making to keep them out of the fields, he and his siblings applied themselves diligently to their studies. He describes the centrality of church to the African American community. His family attended the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church, where his paternal grandfather was a founder and minister.

Radio programs.

Amos 'n' Andy (Radio program).

Door-to-door selling--North Carolina--Carpenter.

African American women sales personnel.

Look magazine.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--North Carolina--Apex.

Segregation in education--North Carolina--Apex.

African American churches--North Carolina.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter, Section A2010_070_001_004, TRT: 0:28:54
2010/07/16

E. Lee Lassiter describes his years at the segregated Berry O'Kelly High School, which was near Raleigh, North Carolina and had a strong curriculum with college preparatory and black history courses. Lassiter was president of the honor society, the Crown and Scepter Club, where his principal, Wilbur D. Moore, taught supplemental courses. During his senior year, Lassiter became interested in journalism while editing the school newspaper, which was established by a student teacher from Shaw University. Lassiter recalls hearing about the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling and reading articles in "Ebony" magazine to understand the decision's importance. During his teenage years, his father took him to visit black institutions, such as Raleigh's Richard B. Harrison Library and the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company in Durham. When Lassiter was approaching his high school graduation in 1954, a family friend, who was a student at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama helped, him apply to there.

Segregation in education--North Carolina--Method.

Segregation in education--North Carolina--Method.

African American high school students--Societies, etc.

Shaw University.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Ebony (Chicago, Ill.).

Richard B. Harrison Library (Raleigh, N.C.).

North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company .

Tuskegee Institute.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Lee Lassiter, Section A2010_070_001_005, TRT: 0:28:35
2010/07/16

E. Lee Lassiter describes his senior year at Berry O'Kelly High School, where he graduated as salutatorian in 1954. He then enrolled at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama through its Five Year Plan, which allowed students to finish in five years while working their way through school. He describes the hardships of being an impoverished college student, sometimes working at five different jobs at once and surviving on soda crackers. He cites Dr. Stanley Smith, his sociology professor and future president of Shaw University, as a major influence, who helped him understand the reasons for white resistance to integration. The recipient of the James Foundation Grant, Tuskegee's largest monetary award to graduates, Lassiter received his B.S. degree in secondary education in 1959. He returned home to North Carolina, where he worked as a janitor in a local hospital while applying to Boston University for graduate school in journalism.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--North Carolina--Method.

Tuskegee Institute.

African American college students--Alabama--Tuskegee.

College students--Work.

African American universities and colleges--Alabama--Tuskegee.

Smith, Stanley Hugh.