



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles Collins

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Charles Collins
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 10, 2011
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2011
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:51:27).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Community leader and association branch chief executive Charles Collins (1947 - ) a Harvard trained lawyer is known for his dedication and support for the San Francisco community, primarily in his capacity as president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco. Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 10, 2011, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2011_010
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Community leader, association branch chief executive and Harvard trained lawyer Charles Miller Collins was born on November 22, 1947 to Daniel Collins and DeReath Curtis James in the Fillmore community of San Francisco, California. After graduating from Tamalpais High School in 1965, Collins pursued higher education at Williams College, where he earned his B.A. degree with honors in 1969. Four years later, Collins earned his Master of City Planning degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and subsequently his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in 1976.

Upon completing his education, Collins began his professional career working with the law firm of Steinhart and Falconer, and then the law firm of Berkeley and Rhodes. An active member of the San Francisco and California communities, Collins led a comprehensive study for the City and County of San Francisco in 1979 and became the deputy secretary of the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency for the State of California in 1980. Collins has also served in leadership capacities as president and chairman of WDG Ventures, Inc., a real estate development firm in San Francisco; president and chief executive officer of the Family Service Agency of San Francisco; and president and chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco. In his work with the YMCA, Collins has supported its mission to strengthen the foundations of communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

Collins has received much recognition for his work in community development, including the 2003 Bicentennial Award from Williams College. In 2005, Collins was named the senior vice chairman of the National Urban League. For his dedication to the organization, the National Urban League established the Charles Collins Award in his honor. Collins was also the author of "The African Americans," a collection of photographs recognizing the

accomplishments of African Americans in various capacities. He was also the senior editor of "A Day in the Life of Africa."

Collins is married to Paula Robinson Collins. They have two daughters, Sara DeReath Collins and Julia Elizabeth Collins.

Charles Collins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 10, 2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles Collins was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 10, 2011, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Community leader and association branch chief executive Charles Collins (1947 - ) is known for his dedication and support for the San Francisco Community, primarily in his capacity as president chief executive officer of the YMCA of San Francisco.

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.  
Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)--Interviews

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African American executives--Interviews.

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African American lawyers--Interviews.

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African American civic leaders--Interviews.

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Collins, Charles M. (Charles Miller)--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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National Urban League

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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BusinessMakers

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## **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 Charles Collins, March 10, 2011. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/15/2011 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage, March 10, 2011

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:57  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins slates his interview and discusses his family background. He was born on November 22, 1947 in San Francisco, California to DeReath Curtis James Collins and Daniel Andrew Collins. His maternal family are the owners of the oldest black-owned company in the United States, C.H. James & Co., which began as a trade business along the James River. Collins describes his maternal grandparents, Edward Lawrence James and Stella Shaw James, his maternal grandmother's family lineage and his father's family background. Collins discusses his family's relationship with Howard Thurman and the significant role Thurman played in the Collins' family's history. Collins' describes how his parents met, his family's move to San Francisco during World War II, his four siblings and earliest childhood memories.

African American families--California--San Francisco.

African American children--California--San Francisco.

African American business enterprises--West Virginia.

Thurman, Howard, 1900-1981.

African American grandparents.

World War, 1939-1945.

African Americans--Migrations--History--20th century.

Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:56  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins talks about the birth of his younger brother Craig. When Craig was brought home from the hospital, Collins and his older brothers were informed that Craig was born mentally handicapped. News of their new brother's condition shifted their expectations, and raised his feeling of responsibility. Collins describes Craig as an amazing person, due in part to their close relationship. Collins grew up in San Francisco's Fillmore District, where he had full exposure to a variety of ethnicities, foods and religions. The Fillmore District was also characterized by its black-owned business, who also provided necessary services to the community. Collins also describes the shift from Japanese residents to black residents during World War II, and the Japanese internment. He talks about the sights, smells and sounds of his childhood, and his family's move to Mill Valley, California and then to Washington, D.C. in 1956.

African American children--San Francisco--Fillmore District.

African Americans--Children with mental disabilities.

Brothers and sisters--Family relations.

African American business enterprises--San Francisco--Fillmore District.  
African Americans--Migrations--History--20th century.  
Migration, Internal--United States--History--20th century.  
World War, 1939-1945.  
Japanese Americans--Evacuation and relocations, 1942-1945.  
African American families--California--Mill Valley.  
African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:47  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins discusses the Civil Rights Movement. Though he was young, he had a sense of the conflict happening around him through information from his parents. He describes going to meetings of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People with his parents. Collins discusses the two years he spent in Washington, D.C., and the ways in which he changed upon his return to San Francisco in 1958. He reflects on the differences between San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and South Carolina, and the varying severity of segregation from state to state. Collins attended Edna Maguire Junior High School and Tamalpais High School, which was more integrated. He was president of his freshman class and a member of the honor society, but he also avoided the shadow of his older brother. As a teenager, Collins listened to R&B artists but also grew up with classical music and jazz.

Civil rights movement.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

African American children--Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

African American children--Social life and customs--San Francisco.

Segregation--San Francisco.

Segregation--Washington (D.C.).

Segregation--South Carolina.

African Americans--Education (Primary)--California--Mill Valley.

African American teenagers--Social life and customs--California.

Brothers and sisters--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:35  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins discusses his college plans. During the fall of his senior year, Collins was informed that he was granted admission to Williams College in Massachusetts. He decided to attend because of its small student body and close student teacher relationships. As a student at Williams, Collins double majored in history and art history, and developed a love of African art through his father's personal collection. Collins discusses his first impressions and experiences at Williams and describes his first two years as a struggle. He talks about his art education and the time he spent with artist Romare Bearden, then the artist-in-residence at Williams. Collins benefited from this relationship in many ways. He remarks that, at that time, there were no courses in African American studies at Williams, but later, a curriculum was established with grant money from Albert Schreck of Tamalpais High School.

African Americans. Education (Secondary)--California--Mill Valley.

African American college students--Williams College.

Williams College.

Bearden, Romare, 1911-1988.

Art--History--Study and teaching.

African Americans--Art Collectors and collecting.

Philanthropy.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:53  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins discusses his exposure to the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. In 1968, Collins traveled to Washington, D.C. to interview Rayford Logan and Sterling Allen Brown, both Williams alums and professors at Howard University. During his interview with Sterling Brown, news of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination was released. He recalls the immediate violent reaction from residents in D.C. Collins graduated from Williams College in 1969, and was awarded a Thompson J. Watson Foundation Fellowship. He traveled to Athens, Greece, under the auspices of family friend Whitney Young of the National Urban League. In Greece, Collins worked with architect and city planner Constantinos Doxiadis looking at large-scale city planning and theory. He then traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Collins talks about meeting his wife, Paula, his research in Brazil, graduate studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the death of Whitney Young.

Civil rights movement.

Logan, Rayford Whittingham, 1897-1982.

Brown, Sterling Allen, 1901-1989.

Howard University.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

Race riots--Washington (D.C.).

Williams College.

African Americans--International travel--Greece--Athens.

Young, Whitney M.

Young, Whitney M.--Death and burial.

Civil rights workers.

African Americans--International travel--Brazil--Rio de Janeiro.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Massachusetts.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Doxiades, Konstantinos Apostolou, 1913-1975.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles Collins, Section A2011\_010\_001\_006, TRT: 0:20:19  
2011/03/10

Charles Collins discusses his experience at Harvard Law School, the intensity of the program and the sense of community amongst the student body. Collins earned his J.D. degree in 1976, after which he returned to San Francisco, California and began working with Steinhart and Falconer, a corporate and real estate law firm. After two years with Steinhart and Falconer, Collins went to work for Berkeley and Rhodes, an African American law firm in Oakland, and joined California Governor Jerry Brown's administration. Collins describes the difference between working for Steinhart and Falconer and Berkeley and Rhodes as resources versus close contact with the community. Collins discusses Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple mass suicide and its impact on urban renewal in San Francisco. He links the two events, implicating gentrification and displacement as a conduit for the Peoples Temple, and ultimately the mass suicide that resulted.

Harvard Law School.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Massachusetts--Boston.

Practice of law--Corporate law--California--San Francisco.

Practice of law--Real estate law--California--San Francisco.

African American lawyers--California--San Francisco.

Brown, Jerry, 1938-.

Jones, Jim, 1931-1978.

Jonestown Mass Suicide, Jonestown, Guyana, 1978.

Urban renewal--California--San Francisco.

Gentrification.