

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Whitlow, Woodrow
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr.,
Dates:	May 3, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:02:06).
Abstract:	Aerospace engineer and federal government administrator Woodrow Whitlow, Jr. (1952 -) has worked for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for over thirty years serving as Associate Administrator for Mission Support at NASA Headquarters and director of the NASA Glenn Research Center. Whitlow was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 3, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_070
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Aerospace engineer and federal government administrator Woodrow Whitlow, Jr. was born on December 13, 1952 in Inkster, Michigan. A quick-learner, he excelled at math and science. Whitlow aspired to be a chemist until space missions in the 1960s captured his imagination, changing his career goal to astronaut. Whitlow received his B.S., M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Aeronautics and Astronautics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1974, 1975 and 1979, respectively.

Whitlow's long career with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) began in 1979, when he was hired as a research scientist at the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia. At Langley, he specialized in fluid dynamics, aerodynamics, and aeroelasticity. He rose quickly to become a senior research scientist and headed various specialty branches in astrophysics and aeronautics. In 1994, Whitlow became the Director of the Critical Technologies Division in the Office of Aeronautics at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. He then moved to the NASA John H. Glenn Research Center at Lewis Field in Cleveland, Ohio in 1998, where he served as the Director of Research and Technology, among other positions. Whitlow was made Deputy Director of the NASA John F. Kennedy Space Center in 2003 and oversaw launch-related services and activities until 2005 when he was appointed to Director of the NASA Glenn Research Center. In 2010, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden named Whitlow the Associate Administrator for the Mission Support Directorate at NASA Headquarters. He retired in August of 2013 and later became Executive in Residence at the Cleveland State University Washkewicz College of Engineering.

Throughout his career, Whitlow has written over forty technical papers, most in the areas of unsteady transonic flow, aeroelasticity and propulsion. His awards include NASA's Distinguished Service Honor Medal—the Agency's highest honor; the Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive—the highest award for federal executives; Presidential Rank of Meritorious Executive; U.S. Black Engineer of the Year in Government; the NASA Exceptional Service Honor Medal; the NASA Equal Opportunity Honor Medal; the (British) Institution of Mechanical Engineers William Sweet Smith Prize; the Minorities in Research Science Scientist-of-the-Year Award; and the National Society of Black Engineers Distinguished Engineer of the Year Award. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics elected him as a Fellow in 2010. He also holds an honorary doctor of engineering degree from Cranfield University.

Woodrow Whitlow, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 3, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 3, 2012, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Aerospace engineer and federal government administrator Woodrow Whitlow, Jr. (1952 -) has worked for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) for over thirty years serving as Associate Administrator for Mission Support at NASA Headquarters

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:

Whitlow, Woodrow

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Whitlow, Woodrow--Interviews

African American engineers--Interviews.

African American government executives--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration

United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Occupations:

Aerospace Engineer

Federal Government Administrator

HistoryMakers® Category:

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., May 3, 2012. 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 Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section A2012_070_001_001, TRT: 1:27:57 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow describes his family background. Whitlow was born in 1952 in Inkster, Michigan. His mother, Willie Mae Whitlow, was born in 1921, in Dudley, Georgia. She worked to clean hospitals and homes. Because she finished high school later in life, Willie Mae Whitlow emphasized the importance of education to her children. Whitlow's father, also named Woodrow Whitlow, was born in Lafayette, Alabama, and raised in Birmingham, Alabama. Whitlow's father served in the South Pacific in World War II, and when he had finished

his military service, he moved to Inkster, Michigan, where he met and married Willie Mar Whitlow.

African American families--Michigan.

African American mothers--Georgia.

African American fathers--Alabama.

World War, 1939-1945.

Inkster (Mich.).

Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section
A2012_070_001_002, TRT: 2:27:42 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow was raised in the city of Inkster, Michigan. Inkster was a haven for African Americans at a time when certain cities were hostile to African Americans. Whitlow has fond memories of listening to the music of Motown on the nation's first African American radio station. He attended George Washington Carver Elementary School, where he was influenced by Ms. Bennett, Ms. Latimore, Ms. Herbert, and Mr. Baylor. Whitlow then attended Fellrath Junior High School, where he had his first real exposure to science. Whitlow was inspired by the American and Russian achievements in space and wanted to become an astronaut. While he had a strong interest in math and science, Whitlow was also interested in sports; he enjoyed playing baseball, basketball, and football.

Inkster (Mich.)--Social life and customs.

Motown Record Corporation.

Education, Primary--Michigan.

Sports & outdoor recreation.

Science--Study and teaching.

Mentoring in education.

Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section
A2012_070_001_003, TRT: 3:28:54 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow's interest in math and science increased as he progressed in school. He attended Inkster High School. Some of his favorite teachers included math teachers Mr. Houston and Mr. Williams. However, the person most influential in his growth and career was the guidance counselor, Dr. Ealy, who obtained a scholarship

for Whitlow to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In 1970, when he graduated from Inkster High School Whitlow enrolled in MIT, where he studied math and science, including material science, physics, and calculus.

Education, Secondary--Michigan.

Mentoring in education.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Science--Study and teaching.

Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section A2012_070_001_004, TRT: 4:29:10 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow began attending Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1970. Halfway through his first year, he married his wife, whom he had known since the third grade. He earned his Ph.D. degree in aeronautics and astronautics from MIT in 1979. His doctoral research focused on unsteady transonic flow. Upon graduation, Whitlow began working at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Langley Research Center where his focus was on transonic air flow, in order to make aircraft safer. While at NASA, he was influenced and mentored by Katherine G. Johnson and Harriett Jenkins.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Marriage.

Aeronautics.

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Langley Research Center

Mentoring in science.

Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section A2012_070_001_005, TRT: 5:31:40 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow built a successful career at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Langley Research Center, where his work focused on improving aircraft safety. While at NASA, Whitlow met Guion Bluford, the first African American to fly into space. He also met Charles Bolden and Mae Jemison.

Whitlow wanted to become an astronaut, but was not able to pass the vision test. In addition to his research, Whitlow has worked with Professor Gregory Selby to initiate programs that would attract minority students to science. He also talks about changing attitudes towards African Americans, and the success of several African Americans at NASA.

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Langley Research Center.

Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942-

Bolden, Charles, 1946-

Jemison, Mae, 1956-

Minorities in science.

Selby, Gregory V. (Gregory Vincent)

Video Oral History Interview with Woodrow Whitlow, Jr., Section A2012_070_001_006, TRT: 6:36:43 2012/05/03

Woodrow Whitlow conducted research at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Langley Research Center. In 1994, he was promoted to the Director of the Critical Technologies Division. Whitlow then served as Director of Research and Technology at the John Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. During his career, Whitlow has also written and published several papers that discuss the future of flight and how to make aircrafts more efficient and safe. Whitlow has been married to Michelle Wimberly Whitlow since 1971, and they have two daughters and two granddaughters. He discusses his hopes for the African American community. Whitlow would like to be remembered for his talent and work ethic.

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Langley Research Center.

NASA Glenn Research Center.

Aeronautics.

African American families.

Reminiscing.

