

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Leland Melvin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Melvin, Leland, 1964-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin,
Dates:	January 15, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:47:37).
Abstract:	Astronaut Leland Melvin (1964 -) , former astronaut serving twice as mission specialist on board the Space Shuttle Atlantis, is NASA Associate Administrator of Education. Melvin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 15, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_018
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Aerospace engineer Leland D. Melvin was born in Lynchburg, Virginia on February 15, 1964 to Deems and Grace Melvin. Upon graduating from Heritage High School in 1982, Melvin was awarded a football scholarship to attend the University of Richmond. He earned his B.A. degree in chemistry from the University of Richmond in 1986, and his M.S. degree in materials science engineering from the University of Virginia in 1991.

From 1982 to 1985, Melvin was a wide receiver on the University of Richmond football team, where he became the all-time reception leader and was an

Associated Press All-America selection in 1984 and 1985. The Detroit Lions selected Melvin in the eleventh round of the 1986 National Football League player draft. Several months later, he suffered a hamstring injury and was unable to fully recover. Melvin's NASA career began in 1989 in the Fiber Optic Sensors group of the Nondestructive Evaluation Sciences Branch at NASA Langley Research Center, where he conducted research in the area of physical measurements for the development of advanced instrumentation for nondestructive evaluation. In 1994, Melvin was selected to lead the vehicle health monitoring team for the cooperative Lockheed/NASA X-33 Reusable Launch Vehicle program.

In 1998, Melvin was selected into the NASA Astronaut Corps. He flew into space twice on the STS-122 in 2008 and STS-129 in 2009. Both missions were aboard the orbiter Atlantis. Melvin has logged more than 565 hours in space.

Additionally, Melvin has served the Astronaut Office Space Station Operations Branch and the Robotics Branch of the Astronaut Office. In 2010, NASA Administrator Charles Bolden selected Melvin as the associate administrator for education. In this position, Melvin travels throughout the U.S. engaging thousands of students and teachers in the excitement of space exploration and inspiring them to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Melvin was also selected to serve on the White House National Science and Technology Council's Committee on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education and is the U.S. representative on the International Space Education Board.

Melvin is a member of the American Chemical Society and the Society for Experimental Mechanics. He also holds honorary doctorates from Centre College, St Paul's College and Campbellsville University.

Leland D. Melvin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 15, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Leland Melvin was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 15, 2013, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Astronaut Leland Melvin (1964 -), former astronaut serving twice as mission specialist on board the Space Shuttle Atlantis, is NASA Associate Administrator of Education.

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:

Melvin, Leland, 1964-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Melvin, Leland, 1964---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Astronaut

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 Leland Melvin, January 15, 2013. 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 Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_001, TRT: 1:29:21 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin discusses his family background. Melvin was born in 1964 in Lynchburg, Virginia. His mother, Gracie Pauline Hughes Melvin, was born in South Boston, Virginia in 1930. Gracie Melvin was known to be a talented seamstress. She attended the Virginia State University, where she earned her B.S. degree in education and home economics. She eventually used her talents to become a home economics teacher. Melvin's father, Deems Melvin, Jr., was raised by his aunt. Growing up, he did odd jobs in the community, but later became a sawmill worker. He served in World War II, and then attended St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where he earned his B.S. degree in education. Melvin later became a school teacher. Deems Melvin, Jr. was very athletic and was a talented football, basketball, and tennis player. He was also an accomplished vocalist, drummer, and trumpet player.

Affirmative action programs.

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Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_002, TRT: 2:31:09 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin's parents met after his mother had completed her undergraduate education. The two married

and had two children - Cathy and Leland. Melvin feels that he inherited his father's sense of humor and his mother's focus. Melvin has early childhood memories of his mother reading to him and caring for him when he had frostbite. He also has memories of spending time in his family's kitchen, and music being played in his home. Melvin developed an early interest in science and math. He remembers causing an explosion in his living room by mixing chemicals from his chemistry set. He has memories of traveling with his family and spending time looking up at the stars. Melvin attended Perrymont Elementary School and was a good student. He was also very athletic, and played football and tennis.

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Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_003, TRT: 3:29:55 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin was as strong a student as he was an athlete. While he attended Heritage High School, he played football and excelled in his classes. He was inspired by his math teacher, Mark Thomas, and his chemistry teacher, Cornelia Campbell. Melvin was awarded a football scholarship to the University of Richmond, where he continued to play football. He graduated with his B.S. degree in chemistry in 1986 and was then drafted to the Detroit Lions. He was cut after he injured his hamstring and was then signed by the Dallas Cowboys. While preparing to go to Dallas' training camp, Melvin met a former teacher who encouraged him to pursue a master's degree in material science at the University of Virginia. Leland started taking classes, intending to go to Dallas in March. Once again, he injured his hamstring in training camp, ending his football career. He then focused on his master's degree.

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Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_004, TRT: 4:33:02 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin is interested in music and photography, and feels that these creative pursuits can draw students to math and science. Melvin completed his M.S. degree in material science in 2000. While he completed his studies at the University of Virginia, he was mentored by Thomas Courtney. During this time, Melvin attended a career fair. There, he met Rosa Webster, who represented the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Melvin was hired to work at NASA on a fiber optics project, until he was offered an opportunity to train to become an astronaut. Melvin began training and was sent to Russia several times to train with Russian cosmonauts. During his training, Melvin had an accident that caused him to lose his hearing. Melvin was unsure that he would ever be able to fly into space.

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Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_005, TRT: 5:28:37 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin suffered an accident during his astronaut training that caused him to lose his hearing completely. After being treated by some of the world's leading physicians, Melvin recovered most of his hearing. He worked with the Astronaut Educator Program, which helps teachers become astronauts. Melvin was eventually medically cleared to resume astronaut training, which consisted of learning about the space shuttle and robotics. As a result of his accident, Melvin could not be trained for space walks. Still, Melvin successfully completed the training and went on to have two space flights, in 2008 and 2009. For his 2008 flight, Melvin was the robotics

expert. For his 2009 flight, Melvin continued to work on robotics, transfer, and the installation of parts. Melvin talks about the physically demanding aspects of space travel, as well as the lingering effects of traveling in space.

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Video Oral History Interview with Leland Melvin, Section
A2013_018_001_006, TRT: 6:15:33 2013/01/15

Leland Melvin was named the associate administrator for the NASA's Office of Education. In this role, Melvin works to increase the number of students entering STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. His concern is that too few students are entering these fields. Similarly, he is concerned that parents in the African American community are not empowering children to reach their goals. While Melvin does not yet have a family of his own, he does hope to have one in the future. He believes that his parents, as educators, appreciate his desire to help others through education. Melvin would like to be remembered as a person that achieved his dreams and inspired others to do the same.

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