

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ernest Levert

---

## 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>	Levert, Ernest, 1954-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 29, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:21:51).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Welding engineer and senior staff manufacturing engineer Ernest D. Levert (1954 -) was the first African American to serve as president of the American Welding Society, as president of the Federation of Material Societies, and as chairman of Commission IV (Power Beam Processes) of the International Institute of Welding. Levert was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 29, 2013, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_025
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Senior staff manufacturing engineer Ernest D. Levert was born on March 14, 1954 in Cleveland, Ohio to parents William and Gertrude Levert. He grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and attended Max S. Hayes Vocational High School. As a sophomore, Levert interned with NASA at the John H. Glenn Research Center. He graduated from Max S. Hayes Vocational High School in 1972. After working briefly as a tool and die welder at Club Products in Cleveland, Levert served a tour of duty in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War and attended the U.S. Navy's Broaden Opportunity for Officers and Selection Training (BOOST) Program. Levert went on to graduate from Ohio State University in 1982 with his B.S. degree in welding engineering, specializing in robotic, laser-beam, and electron-beam welding.

In 1986, Levert joined Lockheed Martin Missiles and Fire Control Division in Dallas, Texas where he worked on projects under NASA and the U.S. Department of Defense such as the Space Shuttle, International Space Station, Multiple Launch Rocket System, and the Army Tactical Missile System. Levert's division created and implemented the heat rejection system and the photovoltaic radiators for the International Space Station thermal batteries and crew areas for removing excess heat. He also developed a welding system of elbow tubing designed to carry coolant gases in radiators that are part of the Space Station. In 1996, Levert was appointed as the senior staff manufacturing engineer at Lockheed Martin. In this position, Levert continued to work on perplexing problems, like the case in 1996 when his development team ensured that the welding of the rocket motor and warhead of live missiles were secure and tamper-proof for international distribution. Throughout his career, Levert has developed standard policies and processes that provide structural integrity for many Lockheed Martin products. He has also contributed to the following books, *BSA Welding Merit Badge Book*, *American Welding Society Welding Handbook*, and *Sparking the Future: National Center for Welding Education and Training*, published by the Welding Education Center in 2009.

In 2002, Levert became the first African American to serve as president of the American Welding Society. In 2006, he was the first African American elected chairman of Commission IV (Power Beam Processes) of the International Institute of Welding. Levert also became the first African American elected president of the Federation of Material Societies in 2007. He was honored with the Outstanding and Distinguished Alumni Awards from the Ohio State University School of Engineering in 2004 and with the NOVA Award for Outstanding leadership from Lockheed Martin in 2006.

Levert and his wife, Rhonda, have two children: Chantale and Ernest Jr.

Ernest D. Levert was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 29, 2013.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ernest Levert was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 29, 2013, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Welding engineer and senior staff manufacturing engineer Ernest D. Levert (1954 -) was the first African American to serve as president of the American Welding Society, as president of the Federation of Material Societies, and as chairman of Commission IV (Power Beam Processes) of the International Institute of Welding.

---

## 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:

Levert, Ernest, 1954-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Levert, Ernest, 1954- --Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Lockheed Martin

---

Lockheed Martin

---

## Occupations:

Material Science Engineer

---

Welding Engineer

---

## 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 Ernest Levert, January 29, 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 5/30/2023 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 Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:58 ?

Ernest Levert describes his family background. His mother, Gertrude Ethel Johnson, was born in August of 1919 in Hillsboro, Alabama. She moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where she attended Central High School. Levert's father, William McKinley Levert, was born in June of 1906 in Hale County, Alabama. The Levert family originates from Ethiopia and France and is related to the famous Levert family. After his family moved from Alabama to Cleveland, Levert joined the U.S. Army and served during World War II. He later worked for the Union Carbide Corporation as a general laborer. Levert talks about his family and his growing up in Cleveland, Ohio.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:12 ?

Ernest Levert talks about his growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended John D. Rockefeller Elementary School. From an early age, Levert was interested in pursuing a career in engineering. He was first introduced to the field by watching television programs, such as "My Three Sons." By the time Levert reached middle school, at Wilson Junior High, his interest in engineering advanced into a fascination with welding. Levert entered Max Vocational High School in 1969, where he focused on welding; he also struggled with some of his math courses. In 1970, Levert worked as a welder's helper at NASA's Lewis Research Center, which fueled his interest in the space program, and found a mentor in Julian Earls [HM]. Levert also talks about his high school mentors, his favorite movie, "October Sky," the 1966 Hough Ohio Riots, and his involvement in sports.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:30 ?

Ernest Levert attended Max Hayes Vocational High School in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to his summer job at NASA's Lewis Space Center, Levert participated in organizations to enhance his leadership skills, such as the Vocational Institution Club of America (VICA), serving as manager of the basketball team, and Boy Scouts of America. After graduating from high school

in 1972, Levert went to work as a tool and die welder at the aluminum cookware manufacturer, Club Products. After working there for two years, he joined the U.S. Navy, where he also attended the C-1 Welding School. Levert describes his experiences being involved with the Boy Scouts, working at Club Products and in the U.S. Navy. He also talks about the importance of communication skills and his interest in Star Trek.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:54 ?

Ernest Levert joined the U.S. Navy in 1974, after spending two years working as a club and die welder at Club Products. Due to his welding preparation at Max Hayes Vocational High School, he completed the Navy's eighteen-week C-1 High Pressure Welding School in ten weeks. After graduating at the top of the Navy's BOOST Program, Levert enrolled at The Ohio State University where he studied welding engineering. When one of his teachers observed his advanced skills, Levert was hired as a teaching assistant during his sophomore year in undergrad. He talks about his summer employment and internships at engineering and manufacturing plants, such as Alcoa and Caterpillar Inc. After receiving his B.S. degree in 1982, and after eighteen job offers, Levert took his first full-time welding engineering job at Ametek Straza in El Cajon, California.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:08 ?

Ernest Levert talks about his academic struggles at The Ohio State University. During his junior and senior years, he served as president of the American Welding Society. After receiving his B.S. degree in welding engineering in 1982, Levert went on to work for Ametek Straza in El Cajon, California, where he worked on building jet engines and the Space Shuttle Challenger. After working there for a little over a year, he joined Geodynamics and worked on robotic applications and atomic cruise missiles. In 1986, Levert joined Lockheed Martin and his projects centered on building missiles.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:55 ?

Ernest Levert joined Lockheed Martin in 1986 and was appointed as project manager of several missile programs because of his expertise with high energy beam welding. One of his most challenging projects was on a live missile system where he developed the electron-beam welding procedures, as well as personally executing the procedure by performing the initial welds. His hard work paid off, earning the company \$700,000. Many of Levert's projects

centered around NASA's space launch programs. Levert discusses the mechanics behind the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, where he lost his friend and mentor, Ronald McNair. He also describes his professional activities and shares his advice for aspiring welding engineers.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernest Levert, Section A2013\_025\_001\_007, TRT: 7:24:14 ?

Ernest Levert talks about his role in the international community of engineers as well as Lockheed Martin's commitment to diversity. Levert discusses his hopes and concerns for the African American community, reflects on his career, talks about his family, and describes his photos.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.

Affirmative action programs.