

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers ® Video Oral History with Eugenia Collier

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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>	Collier, Eugenia W.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 7, 2013 and May 20, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013 and 2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:24:45).
<b>Abstract:</b>	English professor Eugenia Collier (1928 - ) was best known for her 1969 short story "Marigolds." She also taught English for forty-one years at several colleges and universities. Collier was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 7, 2013 and May 20, 2014, in Catonsville, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_223
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Author and professor Eugenia Collier was born on April 6, 1928 in Baltimore, Maryland to Harry Maceo, a physician, and Eugenia Williams, an educator. She received her B.A. degree from Howard University (*magna cum laude*) in 1948. In 1950, she received her M.A. degree from Columbia University and in 1976, her Ph. D. degree from the University of Maryland. Collier's dissertation was "Steps Toward a Black Aesthetic: A Study of Black American Literary Criticism," which was published by the University of Maryland.

After graduating from Columbia University, she worked as a caseworker from 1950 to 1955 with the Baltimore Department of Public Welfare. In 1955, she joined the faculty at Morgan State College (now Morgan State University) as an English instructor. She remained at Morgan State until 1966, as assistant professor. From 1966 to 1996, she taught English at several other colleges and universities, including the Community College of Baltimore (1966-1974), the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (1974-1977), Howard University (1977-1987), Coppin State College (now Coppin State University) (1987-1992) and Morgan State University (1992-1996). She also served as a visiting professor at Southern Illinois University and Atlanta University. She then served as a consultant for several schools and organizations, including Workshop of Center for African and Afro-American Studies (1969), Call and Response Workshop at Karamu House (1970), Pine Manor Junior College (1970) and Bond Humanities Fair, Atlanta, Georgia (1973-1974). In 1996, she retired from teaching.

In 1969, Collier published "Marigolds," which remains a widely read short story. Collier has written or co-written a number of other short stories, essays and books. Collier won the Gwendolyn Brooks Prize for Fiction award in *Negro Digest* in 1969 for "Marigolds." She also received the Outstanding Educators of America Award in 1972 and the Distinguished Writers Award by the Middle Atlantic Writers Association in 1984. Her work has appeared in the *Negro Digest*, *Black World*, *TV Guide*, *Phylon*, *College Language Association Journal* and *The New York Times*. Collier has been a member of several organizations, including the College Language Association, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the Middle Atlantic Writers Association and the African

American Writers Guild.

Eugenia Collier was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 7, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Eugenia Collier was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 7, 2013 and May 20, 2014, in Catonsville, Maryland, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. English professor Eugenia Collier (1928 - ) was best known for her 1969 short story “Marigolds.” She also taught English for forty-one years at several colleges and universities.

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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:

Collier, Eugenia W.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Collier, Eugenia W.--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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## Occupations:

English Professor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Eugenia Collier, August 7, 2013 and May 20, 2014. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:30  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier was born on April 6, 1928 in Baltimore, Maryland to Eugenia Jackson Williams and H. Maceo Williams, Sr. Her paternal family was

descended from a slave named Ann O'Neill and her white owner. Collier's paternal great uncle, Harry O. Wilson, Sr., founded the Mutual Benefit Society insurance company in Baltimore, Maryland. His sister, Collier's paternal grandmother Minnie Wilson Lewis, served as the firm's vice president, and married William Lewis after the death of Collier's paternal grandfather, Nelson Williams, Sr. Collier's maternal great-grandmother, Ellen Jackson, was born in rural Virginia, and relocated to Washington, D.C. to provide better employment opportunities for Collier's grandfather, Eugene Jackson. He went on to work for the government and a printing office, and married Katie Jackson. Together, they raised nine children, including Collier's mother. She studied education at the Miner Normal School in Washington, D.C. and New York University, and became a school principal.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:16  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier's paternal step grandfather, William Lewis, was a member of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks and the founder of the local lodge in Baltimore, Maryland. Collier's father, H. Maceo Williams, Sr., attended the Howard University College of Medicine, and became a well-known doctor in Baltimore's Druid Health District. However, Collier's mother feared doctors and hospitals, and refused prenatal care during her two pregnancies. As a result, Collier's older brother, H. Maceo Williams, Jr., was born with cerebral palsy, and she was born prematurely. Collier lived with her parents and brother in her paternal grandparents' three-story home in Baltimore until the age of eight years old. During this time, Collier's father often read poetry to her, which inspired her love of literature. Collier also remembers her paternal aunt, Fannie Williams Butler, who often tried to pass as white, and adopted a white child named Katheryn Butler.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:24  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier's began her education at Deanwood Elementary School in Washington, D.C., where her mother, Eugenia Jackson Williams, was a teacher. Collier lived with her maternal grandmother during the school week, and returned to her paternal grandmother's home in Baltimore, Maryland on the weekends. Eventually, Collier transferred to School Building 112 in Baltimore, where she went on to attend Booker T. Washington Junior High School and Frederick Douglass High School. There, she was taught by Latin teacher Nellie Buchanan and music teacher William Llewellyn Wilson. The English curriculum mainly consisted of white authors; but, during Negro History Week, Collier learned Negro spirituals and studied Phillis Wheatley, Langston Hughes and Paul Laurence Dunbar. She aspired to become a journalist, and worked at the Baltimore Afro-American during the summers. She also participated in the AFRO Clean Block campaign. At this point, Collier shares a story about her paternal aunt's attempts to pass as white.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:02  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier enrolled at her father's alma mater, Howard University, in the spring of 1945. At this point in the interview, Collier talks about the end of World War II, and the mistreatment of African American veterans upon their return to the United States. Collier majored in English, and was taught by such notable black literary scholars as Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, Ivan E. Taylor and Margaret Just Butcher. She enjoyed reading the works of Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, and met Wright when he visited the campus. In her

spare time, Collier was active with the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority and The Hilltop newspaper. She enjoyed the freedom of living on campus, and also frequently traveled home to Baltimore, Maryland. She also remained close to her mother, who worked at the nearby Deanwood Elementary School. After graduating magna cum laude in 1948, she received a state scholarship to attend Columbia University in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:01  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier enrolled at Columbia University in New York City in 1948. She wrote her master's thesis on African American literature from 1879 to the 1940s. Collier highlighted the contributions of lesser known authors like poet Sterling A. Brown, who was her professor at Howard University. While living in New York City, Collier spent much of her time in Harlem, where she once heard blues musician Lead Belly perform at a local jazz club. In 1950, she married Charles S. Collier, and graduated from Columbia University. She then returned to Baltimore, Maryland, where she served as a caseworker for the Baltimore City Department of Public Welfare. In 1955, Collier was hired at Morgan State College, where she joined a faculty that included civil rights activist Homer Favor, scholar Richard Long and literary critic Darwin Turner. In 1964, she wrote her first short story, 'Marigolds,' which was published in Negro Digest in 1969. That year, Collier received the Gwendolyn Brooks prize for best short story.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:48  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier was an assistant professor at Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland in 1964, when she wrote the short story, 'Marigolds.' The story was first published in Negro Digest by editor Hoyt W. Fuller in 1969. It went on to be featured in many African American anthologies, and Collier was invited to speak at numerous schools. At this point in the interview, Collier shares a synopsis of the story. She also remembers emulating the writing style of poet Robert Frost when she was a novice writer. In 1969, Collier and Ruthe T. Sheffey published the book 'Impressions in Asphalt: Images of Urban America in Literature.' From 1970 to 1974, Collier taught at the Community College of Baltimore, and continued to write short fiction, critical essays and poetry. Her students included the poet and academic administrator Joanne V. Gabbin, and Baltimore city government official Thomas Saunders. At this point, Collier recites her poems 'Nightmare House' and 'Salmon and Saxophones.'

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:12  
2013/08/07

Eugenia Collier taught at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County while pursuing a doctorate at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her dissertation focused on literary criticism and the black aesthetic in African American literature. She built upon the ideas of the leading literary critics of the time, such as Addison Gayle, Jr., George E. Kent and Richard Long. In 1976, Collier became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. degree at the University of Maryland. That year, she also adapted her short story, 'Ricky,' into a play, which was produced by Val Gray Ward's Kuumba Theatre in Chicago, Illinois. Around this time, Collier published critical essays about the television show 'Sanford and Son' and the film 'Conrack.' In 1977, she was hired as an associate professor at her alma mater, Howard University. She also attended the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos, Nigeria, and travelled in South America.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_002\_008, TRT: 8:28:12  
2014/05/20

Eugenia Collier joined the faculty of Howard University in 1977. That year, she was invited to join a group organized by Richard Long, with whom she travelled to Brazil and to Lagos, Nigeria for the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). During this time, Collier became more closely acquainted with Black World editor and First World founder Hoyt W. Fuller. At Howard University, Collier met authors John Oliver Killens, Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, as well as the actor Julian Mayfield, who was a writer in residence at the time. Influenced by her undergraduate professors, Sterling A. Brown and Arthur P. Davis, Collier became a mentor to her own students. With the help of the university librarian, W. Paul Coates, she published a collection of short fiction titled 'Breeder and Other Stories' in 1994. Collier talks about Haki Madhubuti's time at Howard University, and shares her views on the use of the black vernacular as a literary device.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_002\_009, TRT: 9:31:00  
2014/05/20

Eugenia Collier left the faculty of Howard University in 1987, after being denied tenure. She was then hired at Coppin State College in Baltimore, Maryland, where she taught creative writing, African American literature and other literary courses. She also became involved with the Arena Players, Incorporated, a local theatre group that was founded in 1953 and led by Samuel Wilson. In 1992, Collier went to work for Morgan State University, where she served as the chairwoman of the English department and continued to teach. In addition to focusing on African American writers, Collier made an effort to include women and Native Americans in her curriculum. In 1996, Collier moved to the Charlestown Retirement Community in Catonsville, Maryland, where she was an active participant in the Poets' Corner program. She talks about the lack of recognition for African American poets like Sterling A. Brown, Lucille Clifton and Robert Hayden, whom she met at Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_002\_010, TRT: 10:31:04  
2014/05/20

Eugenia Collier's novel 'Beyond the Crossroad' was published by Three Sistahs Press in 1992. The book told the story of a woman who remained enslaved after emancipation, and was inspired by the memories of former slave Margaret Cromer, whom she met Collier through a student in her literature class. Collier went on to publish the collection 'Breeder and other Stories' with the help of W. Paul Coates. The book included stories like 'Rachel's Children,' 'A Present for Sarah' and Collier's most acclaimed piece, 'Marigolds.' In 1996, Collier retired from Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. At the time of the interview, she was writing the novel 'The Day the Gods Wept,' which was published in January of 2017. During her career, Collier contributed to publications like TV Guide, the College Language Association Journal and The New York Times. Her piece 'Sterling's Way' appeared in Callaloo magazine. Collier concludes this part of the interview by sharing her advice to young writers.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_002\_011, TRT: 11:28:33  
2014/05/20

Eugenia Collier talks about the writing of contemporary African American authors like Ta-Nehisi Coates, who was the son of her colleague, W. Paul Coates. She also shares her admiration for the Wintergreen Women Writers' Collective, which was founded by poet Nikki Giovanni. At this point in the

interview, Collier talks about her family. With her ex-husband, Charles S. Collier, she had three sons: Charles M. Collier, Robert N. Collier and Philip Collier. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her life, professional legacy and how she would like to be remembered. Collier concludes this part of the interview by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Collier, Section A2013\_223\_002\_012, TRT: 12:00:43  
2014/05/20

Eugenia Collier concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.