

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert T. Coles

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Coles, Robert Traynham, 1929-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles,
Dates:	April 22, 2018
Bulk Dates:	2018
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:51:48).
Abstract:	Architect Robert T. Coles (1929 - 2020) founded Robert Traynham Coles, Architect, P.C. in 1963. He also co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects, and taught at the University of Kansas and at Carnegie Mellon University. Coles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 22, 2018, in Buffalo, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2018_077
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Architect Robert T. Coles was born on August 24, 1929 in Buffalo, New York to George Edwards and Helena Vesta Traynham Coles. After graduating from Buffalo Technical High School, Coles enrolled at the Hampton Institute. He transferred to the University of Minnesota in 1949, where he co-founded the university's NAACP chapter. Coles received his B.A. degree in 1951, and his B.Arch. degree in 1953; and went on to earn his M.Arch. degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1955.

In 1955, Coles studied in Europe, having received the Rotch Traveling Scholarship from the Boston Society of Architects. Upon returning to the United States in 1956, Coles was hired at the Boston architectural firm of Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean in Boston, Massachusetts. One year later, Coles joined the Boston firm of Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson and Abbott. After spending the next several years at Carl Koch and Associates and working as an architect and custom design manager for Techbuilt, Inc., Coles returned to Buffalo to design the John F. Kennedy Recreation Center. In 1963, he founded his own architectural firm, Robert Traynham Coles, Architect, P.C.; and the following year, he founded the East Side Community Organization. Coles designed the Joseph J. Kelly Gardens Housing for the Elderly in Buffalo in 1967, and the Health, Physical Education and Recreation Complex at the University of Buffalo's Amherst Campus in 1968. In 1972, Coles completed the Urban Park Housing Development in Rochester and founded the Community Planning Assistance Center of Western New York. Coles also served as the American Institute of Architects' deputy vice president for minority affairs. In 1981, he became a fellow at the American Institute of Architects. Coles designed the Providence, Rhode Island Railroad Station in 1984, and the Frank Reeves Center for Municipal Affairs in Washington, D.C. in 1986. Coles also taught as a professor of architecture at the University of Kansas, and later worked as an associate professor of architecture at Carnegie Mellon University. In 1994, he became the first African American chancellor of the American Institute of Architect's College of Fellows; and in 2006, Coles designed Buffalo's Frank E. Merriweather, Jr. Branch Library. Coles published his memoir *Architecture and Advocacy* in 2016.

Coles received an honorary doctorate of letters degree from Medaille College in 1977; and in 1981, he was awarded the Whitney M. Young Jr. Citation from the American Institute of Architects. Coles also received the James Williams Kideney Award from the New York State Association of Architects in 2004; the Robert and Louise Bethune Award in 2009 from the Buffalo/Western New York Chapter, AIA; the Fellows Award from the 2011 Honors Awards Jury, New York State AIA; and in 2016 the Diversity Award from the Buffalo/Western New York Chapter, AIA. In 2011, his home in Buffalo, which he designed, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Coles and his wife, Sylvia Meyn Coles, have a son, Darcy, and a daughter, Marion.

Robert T. Coles was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 22, 2018.

Coles passed away on May 16, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert T. Coles was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 22, 2018, in Buffalo, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Architect Robert T. Coles (1929 - 2020) founded Robert Traynham Coles, Architect, P.C. in 1963. He also co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects, and taught at the University of Kansas and at Carnegie Mellon University.

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:

Coles, Robert Traynham, 1929-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Coles, Robert Traynham, 1929- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Architect

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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 Robert T. Coles, April 22, 2018. 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 Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_001, TRT: 1:32:44 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_002, TRT: 2:28:35 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_003, TRT: 3:28:24 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_004, TRT: 4:28:39 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_005, TRT: 5:28:31 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Robert T. Coles, Section A2018_077_001_006, TRT: 6:24:55 ?