# Overview of the Collection

| Repository: | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616  
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator:</td>
<td>George Campbell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Campbell,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates:</td>
<td>May 17, 2001</td>
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<td>Bulk Dates:</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Description:</td>
<td>8 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:27:22).</td>
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| Abstract:  | College president, nonprofit chief executive, and physicist George Campbell (1945 - ) is  
President of Cooper Union, one of the nation's oldest institutions of higher learning. In  
1977 Campbell earned a Ph.D. in theoretical physics and then worked for Bell Laboratories for twelve years. Later Dr. Campbell became president and CEO of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering. Campbell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 17, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2001_009 |
| Language:  | The interview and records are in English. |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

College President and Physicist Dr. George Campbell, Jr., was born on December 2, 1945, in Richmond, Virginia to Lillian and George Campbell. Campbell graduated with his B.S. degree in Physics in 1968, from Drexel University, where he was a Guggenheim Scholar. While at Drexel, Campbell met his future wife, Mary, whom he tutored in physics; the couple married in 1968, before both going on to graduate studies at Syracuse University. Even as impoverished graduate students, the Campbells took an interest in art and used what little disposable income they had to start their own collection. Campbell's passion for art was so strong that he once considered a career as a painter instead of that of a scientist.

In 1977, Campbell received his Ph.D. in theoretical physics and began working in academic positions at Syracuse University and later at Nkumbi International College in Zambia, where he taught physics and conducted research. Soon thereafter, Campbell left to take a position at AT&T Bell Laboratories, where he would stay for the next twelve years, occupying various research and design and management positions. During his time at Bell Labs, Campbell helped develop the third generation of telecommunication satellites and served as a United States delegate to the International Telecommunications Union. After his tenure at Bell Labs, Campbell became president and CEO of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME), a nonprofit organization designed to open doors of opportunity for young people interested in the field of engineering. Under Campbell's leadership, NACME's public funding nearly tripled and the organization was recognized with a U.S. Presidential Award for Excellence. In July 2000, Oxford University Press published Access Denied: Race, Ethnicity and Scientific Enterprise, which Dr. Campbell co-edited.

On July 1, 2000, Campbell returned to academia when he became the first African American president of Cooper Union, a private university in New York City. The recipient of numerous awards and honors, Campbell and his
wife, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, the Dean of New York University's Tisch School of Arts, raised three sons, the eldest of whom, Garikai, is a professor of Mathematics and Acting Dean of Students at Swarthmore College.

George Campbell Jr., was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on May 17, 2001.

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with George Campbell was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 17, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacam SP videocassettes. College president, nonprofit chief executive, and physicist George Campbell (1945 - ) is President of Cooper Union, one of the nation's oldest institutions of higher learning. In 1977 Campbell earned a Ph.D. in theoretical physics and then worked for Bell Laboratories for twelve years. Later Dr. Campbell became president and CEO of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering.

**Restrictions**

**Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of 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.

**Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

**Persons:**

Campbell, George, Jr.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews
Campbell, George, Jr. --Interviews

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews

African American physicists--Interviews

Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (U.S.)

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

CivicMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 7/12/2011 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, May 17, 2001

Video Oral History Interview with George Campbell, Section A2001_009_001_001, TRT: 0:30:31 2001/05/17

George Campbell slates the interview and describes his favorites. He then shares his mother’s family background, recognizing the work ethic of his maternal grandparents. He also emphasizes the point that he was the family’s first grandchild. He notes his grandfather’s racial background as being a mixture of white, black, and Cherokee. He then returns to the topic of his mother [Lillian Britt Campbell], who spent much of her childhood living in New York City, New York. Campbell then describes his father and remembers his parents’ relationship and eventual divorce. Campbell then recalls his earliest childhood memories, playing on his grandparents’ farm in Virginia and the family cooking. Growing up, Campbell remembers living with his mother and brother, Robert Campbell. Campbell closes the interview tape by discussing the schools he attended as a youth, and describing how he ended up studying at Central High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews
African American physicists--Interviews
Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews

Video Oral History Interview with George Campbell, Section A2001_009_001_002, TRT: 0:29:56 2001/05/17

George Campbell first considers the characteristics of his mother working to raise two sons on her own in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He then considers the values of the church, and how his family shaped his moral values as a youth. Campbell then thoroughly explores his years at Central High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, describing how he was accepted to the school, the involvement of Bell Laboratories in presenting new technologies to the students, and the social atmosphere of the racially mixed student population. After touching upon his interest in art, he then describes how he applied and attended college on a limited budget. Campbell remembers beginning his studies at Drexel University in 1963 with financial support from a Guggenheim Scholarship. He closes the tape discussing the work opportunities available to him during his college career.

African American families--New York (State)
African American farmers--Virginia
Education--New York (State)--New York

Video Oral History Interview with George Campbell, Section A2001_009_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00

Video Oral History Interview with George Campbell, Section A2001_009_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 2001/05/17

George Campbell then describes how he ended up in Philadelphia and faculty members at Drexel University. He provides a thorough description of his early years at Drexel, including his social and academic experiences. He concludes the tape by discussing the opportunities available to him during his college years.

African American families--New York (State)
African American farmers--Virginia
Education--New York (State)--New York
George Campbell shares that he met his wife, Mary Schmidt Campbell when he was fifteen years-old. They dated in college and dealt with cultural clashes because she came from a middle class family. Campbell recalls the relationship that he had with Mary’s father, Harvey Schmidt, who was a well known civil rights activist. After graduating from Drexel, Campbell got married and was then drafted into the Vietnam War, receiving conscientious objector status. As a result, Campbell was stationed in Zambia in 1969, to teach physics for two-years before graduate school. Campbell describes his time in Zambia including the South African refugees that he taught at in Zambia. Campbell described the growth experience for him of living in Zambia noting differences and similarities between that culture and hid own. Campbell’s first son was born in Zambia. Campbell describes his return home and when his family met his son for the first time.

Single-parent families--United States
AT&T Bell Laboratories
Drexel University
Education, Elementary

Campbell attended Syracuse University along with his wife, studying high energy theoretical physics. After he and his wife earned their Ph.Ds in 1977, Campbell accepted a job at Bell Laboratories, and his wife took a position as the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem. Campbell described his work at Bell Labs. Campbell switched to studying magnetospheric physics relating to the telecommunication satellites that Bell was developing at the time. From there Campbell got involved in designing and developing new generations of solar cell power systems for satellites. By 1984, Campbell became the head of an international research and development operation. Campbell spoke about how being African American at Bell, which was known supporting African Americans. In the 1980’s Campbell and colleagues established the Black Technical Managers Group at Bell, which provided a forum for black managers and Bell even paid for them to hold meetings and organize trips.

Campbell, Mary Schmidt
Vietnam War, 1961-1975--African Americans
Zambia
Conscientious objectors United States

Campbell begins by explaining the necessity of being self-important, and almost arrogant at Bell Laboratories. Each employee was required to present the work they have done in front of a panel to show the contributions that they have made personally. Campbell remembers leaving Bell Labs to become the president of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering in 1990. Campbell goes on to talk about NACME’s mission in educational outreach and scholarship criteria. Campbell recalls changing NACME’s Engineering Vanguard Program to spend the money on fewer students and provide the kind of infrastructure necessary to make them truly successful. He then outlines the curriculum and recruitment processes of the NACME Engineering Vanguard Program as well as some of the success stories.

Syracuse University
George Campbell describes how the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering operated, explaining that he helped improve research by organizing conferences, inviting sixty-five leading researchers (social scientists, social psychologists, educational psychologists) from around the country to look at access of education for minority students. Campbell describes his reasons for leaving NACME in 2000, to work at Cooper Union because of the school’s rich history, as well as its focus on art and science. He explains his strategies for attracting top students to Cooper Union and increasing the funding sources needed to provide free education for all students who attended. Campbell then describes his family. His children range in age from thirty-two to ten, and he also has several grandchildren. Finally, Campbell speaks about his hopes that through education, the African American community can achieve equality.

Campbell explains that he does not think about his legacy, and that it is more up to the historians to decide an individual’s legacy. As long as he does his best where he is, his legacy will create itself. Campbell continues by relating a story about mentoring at Bell Laboratories. He concludes the interview by saying that he wants Cooper Union to provide a superb secondary education.

George Campbell slates the interview and describes his favorites. He then shares his mother’s family background, recognizing the work ethic of his maternal grandparents. He also emphasizes the point that he was the family’s first grandchild. He notes his grandfather’s racial background as being a mixture of white, black, and Cherokee. He then returns to the topic of his mother [Lillian Britt Campbell], who spent much of her childhood living in New York City, New York. Campbell then describes his father and remembers his parents’ relationship and eventual divorce. Campbell then recalls his earliest childhood memories, playing on his grandparents’ farm in Virginia and the family cooking. Growing up, Campbell remembers living with his mother and brother, Robert Campbell. Campbell closes the interview tape by discussing the schools he attended as a youth, and describing how he ended up studying at Central High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.