

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lamonte McLemore

---

## 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>	McLemore, Lamonte, 1935-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 3, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:32:44).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer and singer Lamonte McLemore (1935 - ) worked extensively with Ebony and Jet magazines and was the first African American photographer hired by Harper's Bazaar. He was also a talented singer and member of the Grammy award-winning group, The 5th Dimension. McLemore continued to work on his craft as a photographer and sang with Flashback, a vocal group consisting of other singers from the 1960's who entertained for charity events. McLemore was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 3, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_120
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Photographer and singer Lamonte McLemore was born on September 17, 1935, in St. Louis, Missouri, to June and Herman J.C McLemore. Abandoned by his father at the age of five and having a mother who worked long hours, McLemore was largely raised by his maternal grandmother, Gertrude Whitecloud Shaver. He graduated from Charles H. Sumner High School in 1952 and enlisted in the United States Navy, where he worked as an aerial photographer.

Athletically gifted, McLemore was the first African American athlete to try out for the St. Louis Cardinals. He moved to Los Angeles, California, and landed a short-lived minor league career with the Los Angeles Dodgers as a strong-arm pitcher.

In 1958, McLemore began his career as a photographer with Halmont Graphics, a company he co-founded. He became the first African American photographer hired by *Harper's Bazaar* magazine and was the photographer chosen to shoot Stevie Wonder's first album cover. McLemore has been a photographer for *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines for over forty years. During McLemore's photo shoot of the Miss Black Beauty Pageant in the mid-1960s, he discovered the talents of Marilyn McCoo and Florence LaRue. McLemore offered the two women a chance to join a group he and his friends, Billy Davis, Jr. and Ron Townson, were forming. Out of this collaboration, The 5th Dimension was created. Their first manager was musician Ray Charles.

The 5th Dimension experienced exceptional success over the years, receiving more Grammy Awards than The Beatles. Their biggest hit was *Aquarius*, which led to the album *The Age of Aquarius*. The album and the single both went gold and received two Grammy Awards for Record of the Year and Best Contemporary Vocal by a

Group or Duo. In 1991, the original 5th Dimension received a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame.

In 2006, McLemore retired from the group, but continues to sing with Flashback, a vocal group made up of other singers from the 1960s who entertain for charity events.

McLemore resides in Las Vegas, Nevada, with his wife, Mieko.

Lamonte McLemore was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 3, 2007.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lamonte McLemore was conducted by Denise Gines on April 3, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer and singer Lamonte McLemore (1935 - ) worked extensively with Ebony and Jet magazines and was the first African American photographer hired by Harper's Bazaar. He was also a talented singer and member of the Grammy award-winning group, The 5th Dimension. McLemore continued to work on his craft as a photographer and sang with Flashback, a vocal group consisting of other singers from the 1960's who entertained for charity events.

---

## 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:

McLemore, Lamonte, 1935-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
McLemore, Lamonte, 1935- --Interviews

---

African American photographers--Interviews.

---

African American singers--Interviews.

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

5th Dimension (Musical group)

---

## Occupations:

Photographer

---

Singer

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|MusicMakers

---

## 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 Lamonte McLemore, April 3, 2007. 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 Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Lamonte McLemore was born on September 17, 1935 in St. Louis, Missouri to June Shaver McLemore and Herman McLemore. McLemore's maternal grandmother, Gertrude Whitecloud Shaver, lived on a Cherokee reservation before meeting McLemore's maternal grandfather, Lucian C. Shaver, Sr. She joined him in Arkansas, along with her brother, who was later lynched by a group of white men. In St. Louis, McLemore grew up in a garage belonging to his mother's wealthy employers. After his father left, his family moved to a two-room house near the Mississippi River with McLemore's maternal grandmother, who helped raise the children. He recalls eating scraps from the nearby packinghouse, and watching television through local shop windows. McLemore attended St. Louis' Cote Brillante Elementary School and Charles H. Sumner High School, where he was involved with the baseball team and bugle corps. Upon graduation, McLemore tried out for the St. Louis Cardinals, but never heard from the coaches, as he did not own a telephone.

African American families.

Saint Louis (Mo.)--Social conditions--20th century.

African Americans--Social conditions--Missouri--Saint Louis--20th century.

African American single mothers.

African American fathers--Desertation and non-support--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Urban poor--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:43 ?

Lamonte McLemore's maternal grandmother, Gertrude Whitecloud Shaver, helped him recognize his interests in baseball, singing and photography. Unable to join the Negro League, McLemore went to Chicago, Illinois for college, but encountered gang violence there. He instead enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and was assigned to serve as a steward in San Diego, California, where he faced racial discrimination from his superiors. After refusing to shine a lieutenant's shoes, McLemore was charged with insubordination, and transferred to the underwater demolition team, a precursor to the U.S. Navy Seals. He left after the rigorous training period, and was reassigned to Alaska's Naval Air Facility Adak for flight training. McLemore pitched for the U.S. Navy's baseball team throughout his U.S. military career, and was eventually scouted by the Los Angeles Dodgers. Just after signing with the team, McLemore broke his arm, ending his baseball career. Instead, he found work as a darkroom technician in Los Angeles, California.

African American baseball players.

United States--Navy--African Americans.

African American sailors--Social conditions--20th century.

Segregation--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Gangs--Illinois--Chicago.

African American grandmothers.

Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Lamonte McLemore worked as a darkroom technician and photographer at the Jack and Jill photography studio in Los Angeles, California. The company hesitated to allow him to take photographs because he was African American, but he soon became their best employee. After two years, McLemore established the Halmont Graphics studio, and became a photographer for magazines such as Jet and Harper's Bazaar. Following the success of his own magazine, Elegant, McLemore signed with Motown, where he photographed The Supremes, The Temptations and Stevie Wonder. While photographing the Miss Black America beauty pageant, McLemore discovered Marilyn McCoo and Florence LaRue. With McCoo, he formed a jazz group, the Hi-Fi's, and signed a contract with Ray Charles. While on tour with Ray Charles, they were once in a minor plane crash in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After the Hi-Fi's disbanded, McLemore created The Versatiles with McCoo, LaRue and his friends from St. Louis, Ronald Townson and Billy Davis, Jr.

African American photographers.

African American singers.

Musical groups.

Photography--vocational guidance.

5th Dimension (Musical group).

Charles, Ray, 1930-2004.

Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:14 ?

Lamonte McLemore created The Versatiles after his first band, the Hi-Fi's, dissolved. McLemore had connections at Motown, where he previously worked as a photographer, and secured an audition with founder Berry Gordy. After being turned down by Gordy, The Versatiles signed with Johnny Rivers' company, Soul City Records, and changed their name to The 5th Dimension. Through their manager, Marc Gordon, the band began working with songwriter Jimmy Webb, who wrote The 5th Dimension's first hit, 'Up, Up and Away,' and many others. The band won several Grammy Awards for their songs, including 'Aquarius.' Their musical style combined classical, jazz and country western music; and, because of this, many people did not know that the group was comprised of African Americans. McLemore reflects upon how The 5th Dimension's ability to move between genres helped break down barriers for black musical artists. He also remembers his acquaintance with Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Sonny Turner and Laura Nyro.

Rhythm and blues music.

Popular music--Social aspects--United States.

African American musicians.

Sound recording industry--Corrupt practices.

Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Lamonte McLemore's fellow band members Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, Jr. married in 1969, as did Florence LaRue and their manager, Marc Gordon. Soon after, The 5th Dimension signed with Bell Records, and recorded 'One Less Bell to Answer' and 'Love Hangover.' In 1970, The 5th Dimension performed for President Richard Nixon at a dinner for Imelda Marcos, the first lady of the Philippines. Five years later, Davis and McCoo were replaced after leaving to pursue their own singing careers. All five members reunited for a tour in 1991, and were awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame that year. McLemore met his wife, Mieko Tone McLemore, at a photography studio, and married her in 1995. After leaving The 5th Dimension in 2006, McLemore enjoyed visiting casinos; playing on a charity softball team; and performing with his band, Flashback. McLemore reflects upon his life, and his advice for aspiring artists. He also describes his hopes and concerns for the world, and how he would like to be remembered.

African American families.

African Americans--Marriage.

Rhythm and blues music.

American American Photography.

5th Dimension (Musical group).

Video Oral History Interview with Lamonte McLemore, Section A2007\_120\_001\_006, TRT: 0:09:27 ?

Lamonte McLemore narrates his photographs.