

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Manford Byrd, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Byrd, Manford
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr.,
Dates:	July 1, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:41:22).
Abstract:	Elementary school principal, school superintendent, and high school principal Manford Byrd, Jr. (1928 - 2021) has worked for the Chicago Public Schools as a teacher and administrator, and served in several deputy superintendent positions before he was appointed general superintendent of schools. Byrd was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_076
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator Manford Byrd, Jr. was born on May 29, 1928 in Brewton, Alabama. He studied mathematics at Iowa Central College and graduated in 1949. He then pursued graduate work, earning his M.A. from Atlanta University in 1954 and his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in 1978.

Byrd began his career in education teaching in Quincy, Illinois from 1949-1954. From 1954-1967, he worked for the Chicago Public School system as a teacher, assistant principal, elementary and high school principal and assistant to the General Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools. In 1968, he was appointed Deputy Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools. In this role, he oversaw the day-to-day operations of the school system. He was later appointed Deputy Superintendent for Instruction and Deputy Superintendent for Pupil Services and System-Wide Reorganization. In 1985, he was appointed General Superintendent of Schools, a position he would hold until he retired in 1990. Since retiring, Byrd works in private practice, as an educational consultant.

Byrd has sat on the boards of directors of the Chicago State University Foundation, Joint Negro Appeal, the Mid-America Chapter of the American Red Cross, the Council of the Great City Schools, the Chicago NAACP and the United Church Board for World Ministries. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of Central College, Pella Iowa and the Adler Planetarium, Chicago. All together, he is a member of over 70 professional organizations.

Byrd has been the recipient of over 100 awards and commendations for excellence in teaching and academic administration, including honorary doctoral degrees from Central College, Hope College and the National College of Education. He and his wife, Cheribelle, have three sons.

Byrd passed away on January 17, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Manford Byrd, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 1, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Elementary school principal, school superintendent, and high school principal Manford Byrd, Jr. (1928 - 2021) has worked for the Chicago Public Schools as a teacher and administrator, and served in several deputy superintendent positions before he was appointed general superintendent of schools.

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:

Byrd, Manford

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Byrd, Manford--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

School Superintendent

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Manford Byrd, Jr., July 1, 2002. 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 Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_001, TRT: 0:28:38
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Manford Byrd was born on May 29, 1928 in Brewton, Alabama to Manford Byrd, Sr., who was born in 1902, and Evelyn Turk Byrd, who was born in 1909, both of whom were from nearby Covington County, Alabama. Although his father was illiterate, he valued education and encouraged Byrd, Jr.'s education. Byrd, his parents, and his older brother, Ralph, lived in Brewton, which was a

small, rural community in Alabama that was fifty percent black. The Brewton, Alabama school system was deeply segregated, and Byrd attended the Reformed Church of America's school, Southern Normal High School, from 1941 to 1946, graduating as its salutatorian. He received a four year scholarship to attend Central Iowa University in Pella, Iowa, which was located in an entirely white town. Being the only black male student in Pella, Iowa was difficult for Byrd, but he had a lot of support from the community. Initially wanting to become an engineer, instead he graduated from there in 1949 with a degree in mathematics.

Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_002, TRT: 0:29:28
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Manford Byrd attended Central Iowa University in Pella, Iowa, where he was the only African American man in the town. While he had support there, he experienced racism and discrimination. After graduating from there in 1949, Byrd was hired at the school system in Quincy, Illinois as a teacher. He worked there until 1954, when he obtained his Master's degree from Atlanta University in Georgia that year, and then moved to Chicago, Illinois as a teacher on the West Side. Teaching in Chicago was vastly different than in Quincy, Illinois. Byrd talks about the issues that affected black students in the 1950s and 1960s in Chicago, including the mobile classroom units, called "Willis Wagons," installed by Superintendent Benjamin Willis, and the double shift system, which staggered the school schedules of black and white students. During the 1950s, became a master teacher and then to one of the first black assistant principals in the city. In 1956, he married his wife, Cheri, who was also a teacher in Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_003, TRT: 0:28:45
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Manford Byrd received his Master's Degree from Atlanta University in 1954, and then moved to Chicago, Illinois. He realized his administrative talent, and began to advance through the Chicago Public School system; in 1968, he was appointed to the Deputy Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, and in doing so, he was the highest ranking African American in the school system in the country at that time. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Byrd was a frontrunner to become Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, but city politics proved difficult and in 1981, HistoryMaker Ruth Love was appointed as the Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools under Mayor Jane Byrne. Although Byrd was the choice of the African American community for appointment as Superintendent, he was not appointed Superintendent until 1985, where he served until his retirement in 1990. Byrd reflects on the political culture in Chicago in the 1980s, which made it difficult for African Americans to be represented in city leadership.

Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_004, TRT: 0:28:23
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Manford Byrd was an administrator in the Chicago Public School system in Illinois throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, before being appointed Superintendent of Chicago Public Schools in 1985. He had a lot of community support but struggled to advance within the political structure of the small Board of Education. In 1975, Joseph Hannon was appointed Superintendent over Byrd, and in 1981, HistoryMaker Ruth Love was appointed over him again. During his tenure as Superintendent, Byrd received a lot of support from Chicago's black community, though he faced challenges with securing funding, navigating city bureaucracies, and with politics in Springfield and Chicago, Illinois. He received a lot of recognition for helping to improve various diverse communities in Chicago through his educational initiatives, such as revamping the math and

reading programs and improving the national test scores of Chicago students.

Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_005, TRT: 0:30:55
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Manford Byrd describes his philosophy of education. With regards to urban education in a city like Chicago, Illinois, he advocates community and parental involvement, as well as competent and passionate teachers. He then reflects on the shifting independent education movement in Chicago over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, describing the increase of charter schools and the implementation of the school voucher system. Byrd maintains that a strong public school system is needed to ensure educational opportunities for every student. Byrd then reflects on his legacy as an educator, and then narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Manford Byrd, Jr., Section A2002_076_001_006, TRT: 0:15:13
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Manford Byrd narrates his photographs.