

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sylvester Small

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Small, Sylvester, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sylvester Small,
Dates:	August 1, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:17:10).
Abstract:	School superintendent Sylvester Small (1947 -) worked in the Akron, Ohio, school system for over thirty years while also staying very involved in the community. Small was the winner of the Harold K. Stubbs Humanitarian Award for Distinguished Service in Education. Small was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 1, 2002, in Akron, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_134
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. Sylvester Small, Superintendent of the Akron, Ohio Public Schools, was born on February 26, 1947 in Akron, Ohio, the third of six brothers. Both of his parents migrated from segregated Clarksdale, Mississippi to Akron. They instilled in him the value of every life experience as an educational experience. Graduating from Hower Vocational High School in 1965, Small worked a variety of jobs to raise money to attend college and stay out of the Vietnam War. Inspired by the dedicated teachers he encountered as a student, Small intended to become a schoolteacher. In 1966 he enrolled in the University of Akron and by 1971 he was teaching in the Akron Public Schools. Sylvester Small continued his postgraduate education at the University of Akron, earning his Masters in 1976 and his Ed. D. in 1984.

For the past 32 years, Sylvester Small has served as a substitute teacher, teacher, board administrator, assistant principal and principal at both the elementary and secondary levels. He also took on the roles of urban demonstration project teacher, social studies curriculum specialist, coordinator of student services, and assistant superintendent of for curriculum and instruction. When Akron sought a new Superintendent of Schools in 2001 Small, with the support of the community was elevated to the role of Superintendent of the Akron Public Schools.

Superintendent Small, assisted by 4,000 administrators, teachers, counselors, librarians, and other personnel, was accountable for the administration and distribution of \$334,814,771 during 2001/2002. His vision for the Akron Public Schools is a world - class, student - focused, community - based learning system. On October 15, 2001 Small guided the city and school board to the table to sign a Contract With The Community, pledging to accomplish a broad range of goals.

An active participant in community and professional organizations, Small is a member of the NAACP, Leadership Akron, the Coming Together Project, the Akron Alliance of Black School Educators and the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He is the recipient of many awards including the Harold K. Stubbs Humanitarian Award for

Distinguished Service in Education and the Outstanding Professional Person of the Year Award from the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club. Small retired from his superintendent position on July 31, 2007. A lifelong resident of Akron, Dr. Sylvester Small lives there with his wife, Elaine.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sylvester Small was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 1, 2002, in Akron, Ohio, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. School superintendent Sylvester Small (1947 -) worked in the Akron, Ohio, school system for over thirty years while also staying very involved in the community. Small was the winner of the Harold K. Stubbs Humanitarian Award for Distinguished Service in Education.

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:

Small, Sylvester, 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Small, Sylvester, 1947---Interviews

African American school superintendents--Ohio--Akron--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 Sylvester Small, August 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 Sylvester Small, Section A2002_134_001_001, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Sylvester Small describes his family background and childhood. His mother, Florida Small was born on October 17, 1925 in Clarksdale, Mississippi and his father, Walter Small, was born on May 12, 1917 in Clarksdale. Small knew neither of his grandfathers, but had a close relationship with his maternal grandmother, who had moved from Clarksdale to Akron, Ohio to build tanks at B.F. Goodrich during World War II, taking her family with her. Small was born on February 26, 1947 and is the third of six brothers. Small decided that he wanted to be a teacher after being inspired by the dedication of a black physical education teacher named James Scrubs, who worked with the Neighborhood Youth Group to sponsor a boxcar derby for students. Small graduated from Hower Vocational High School in 1965 and began work because a guidance counselor told him to work at a lumber company instead of attending college. However, Small quit his job at the lumber company and enrolled at University of Akron in Ohio in December of 1965.

African American school superintendents--Ohio--Akron--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvester Small, Section A2002_134_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Sylvester Small describes his experience at the University of Akron in Ohio and in Akron Public Schools. In December of 1965, Small was working to raise money for college when he received his draft notice to serve in the Vietnam War. Because he was too late to enroll in a full semester of classes, but able to be hand-registered in classes, he successfully avoided the draft. While at University of Akron, Small worked a series of jobs to pay for school and studied both history and education. Because the University did not offer a certificate in education, Small graduated with his B.A. degree in social studies in 1969; and in 1970 began substitute teaching for Thornton Junior High School. By September of 1970, Small was a full time teacher and over the course of thirty-two years, Small held a variety of jobs within Akron Public Schools including teacher, security, student services, and curriculum specialist before becoming the principal at Buchtel High School, the largest minority school in Akron, Ohio.

Video Oral History Interview with Sylvester Small, Section A2002_134_001_003, TRT: 0:19:30 ?

Sylvester Small describes becoming the first black superintendent of Akron Public Schools in Ohio in 2001. He discusses the problems facing Akron Public Schools and African American students in particular. He also talks about his legacy, his family, and his plans for the future.