

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Monroe Anderson

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## 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>	Anderson, Monroe, 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 16, 2006 and November 21, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	12 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:57:56).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Journalist and editor Monroe Anderson (1947 - ) was the press secretary for Chicago mayor Eugene Sawyer. He was also the editor for N'Digo and SaVoy magazines. Anderson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 16, 2006 and November 21, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_144
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Journalist Monroe Anderson III was born on April 6, 1947, in Gary, Indiana. Growing up and attending public schools in Gary, Anderson developed a keen interest in writing at an early age. After graduation from high school in Gary, Indiana, Anderson attended Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and received his B.A. degree in journalism and English literature. After completing his B.A. degree, Anderson worked as a reporter at the *National Observer*, as assistant editor of *Ebony* magazine, and as a correspondent for *Newsweek* magazine prior to joining the *Chicago Tribune*. In the late 1980s, Anderson worked as the press secretary for democratic Mayor Eugene Sawyer.

Later in his career, Anderson taught feature writing at Columbia College Chicago, and for thirteen years he was director of station services and community affairs at WBBM-TV (CBS2). During this time at CBS television station in Chicago, he became host and executive producer of the public affairs television show, *Common Ground*. Anderson is one of the co-authors of the nonfiction book *Brothers*, which was published by William Morrow & Company in 1988. During Anderson's thirty-five-year career as an award-winning journalist, Anderson became a contributing author to *Restoration 1989: Chicago elects a new Daley*, a book published by Lyceum in 1991 detailing the 1989 Chicago mayoral election.

In 2003, Chicago publisher Hermene Hartman named Anderson as editor of *N'DIGO*, a black community newspaper, and in 2003, Anderson became the editor of *SaVoy* magazine. Anderson also serves as a board member to the Gilda's Club, a cancer support center.

Anderson lives in Chicago, Illinois.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Monroe Anderson was conducted by Linda Williams on November 16, 2006 and November 21, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 12 Betacame SP videocassettes. Journalist and editor Monroe Anderson (1947 - ) was the press secretary for Chicago mayor Eugene Sawyer. He was also the editor for N'Digo and SaVoy magazines.

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Anderson, Monroe, 1947-

Williams, Linda (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Anderson, Monroe, 1947- --Interviews

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African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African American television journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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African American editors--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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Press secretaries--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Journalist

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Editor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## 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 Monroe Anderson, November 16, 2006 and November 21, 2006. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:03  
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Monroe Anderson was born on April 6, 1947 in Gary, Indiana to Norma Scott Anderson and Monroe Anderson, Jr. His maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Scott, had Sioux ancestry, and worked as a kindergarten teacher. She gave birth to Anderson's mother in Sparta, Illinois, and moved with her to Gary after the death of Anderson's maternal grandfather, Samuel Scott, Sr. Anderson's father was born in the Mississippi Delta, and was raised by his grandparents after his parents and siblings were killed in a tornado. He moved to Chicago, Illinois at sixteen years old, and then relocated to Gary, where he met and married Anderson's mother. Anderson's father served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and was accompanied by Anderson's mother while stationed in Mississippi and California. When his tour ended, the couple returned to Gary, where they raised three children, including Anderson. As a child, Anderson shined shoes and swept the floors at his great uncle's barbershop to earn spending money.

African American journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American television journalists--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American editors--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Press secretaries--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:27  
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Monroe Anderson grew up on the east side of Gary, Indiana. There, his father, Monroe Anderson, Jr., delivered coal and drove a taxi during the week; and, on Sundays, watched cowboy movies with the family. Anderson began his education at Gary's East Pulaski School, and transferred to the Lincoln School after his family moved to the west side of town. There, he missed the start of the second grade after being severely burned in a scalding accident. Anderson went on to attend Theodore Roosevelt High School, where he excelled in his English classes. He served as the editor of the Panther Post student newspaper; and, after meeting Chicago Daily News reporter Les Brownlee, aspired to a career in journalism. Upon graduating, Anderson enrolled at Indiana University in Bloomington. He remembers the notable alumni of Theodore Roosevelt High School, including actors William Marshall and Alex Karras; and his brother, Dariek Anderson, who suffered from schizophrenia and was murdered in 1999.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:41  
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Monroe Anderson attended Theodore Roosevelt High School in Gary, Indiana. There, he acted in numerous theater productions, including W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's 'H.M.S. Pinafore,' Agatha Christie's 'Witness for the Prosecution' and Archibald MacLeish's 'J.B.' Anderson also joined the school's football and basketball teams. Although he was a popular student, Anderson was frequently bullied by the local gangs, and was often reprimanded by his teachers for his rambunctious behavior. Anderson attended Gary's First A.M.E. Church with his family, and visited Pentecostal congregations with a Christian youth group. Upon graduating from Theodore Roosevelt High School, he worked at the United States Steel Corporation's Gary Works for two weeks, before being fired for sustaining too many injuries. He worked at the Republic Steel Company for the remainder of the summer; and then, in 1965, matriculated at the majority-white Indiana State University in Bloomington, Indiana, where he

maored in journalism.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:04  
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Monroe Anderson had difficulty transitioning to the majority-white environment at Indiana University in Bloomington, after growing up in a predominantly African American community in Gary, Indiana. However, he befriended his black dormitory mates, including jazz musician Charles Ellison. Anderson also struggled with his courses in journalism, French and the Air Force Reserve Officer's Training Corps; and was placed on academic probation at the start of his sophomore year. After a meeting with the dean, Anderson transferred to the School of Education, where he changed his major to English, and continued to take journalism classes. He was impressed by the activism of Stokely Carmichael, and became involved in the black power protests at Indiana University. He was also inspired by 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X' by Malcolm X and Alex Haley. Anderson joined the Indiana University's Indiana Daily Student as a reporter, and accepted an internship at Newsweek during his junior year.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:00  
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Monroe Anderson attended the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois as an intern for Newsweek. He and journalist John Culhane were assigned to cover the anti-war protests in downtown Chicago, where they were assaulted by police officers. Anderson then covered a protest in front of the Conrad Hilton Hotel, which was heavily patrolled by the Illinois Army National Guard. During the protests, he met politician R. Sargent Shriver and The Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham. At the end of the internship, Anderson was interviewed by radio stations in New York City about his experiences of police brutality. Upon returning to Indiana University, he joined the public relations department at the Indiana University News Bureau, and participated in the student protests against the administration. He considered joining the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, but ultimately decided against it to avoid the initiation process. Upon graduating, Anderson sought employment at newspapers like The New York Times.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:03  
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Monroe Anderson was the first black reporter at The National Observer. There, he interviewed actor Ossie Davis, and the original Broadway cast of 'Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical,' including actor Ted Lange and gospel singer Helen Baylor. He also covered the National Black Political Convention, which featured Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, poet Amiri Baraka and Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher. Anderson considered accepting Ida Lewis' offer of a position at Encore magazine, but decided to work for Ebony magazine after interviewing with managing editor Charles L. Sanders. At Ebony, Anderson interviewed musician Curtis Mayfield and newscaster Jim Tilmon, and worked under publisher John H. Johnson and editor Lerone Bennett. He left Ebony to join the staff of the Chicago Tribune, where he met reporters Clarence Page and Vernon Jarrett. Anderson's first investigative piece about automotive repair businesses was a national success, and led to his appearance on 'The Phil Donahue Show.'

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_007, TRT: 0:30:07  
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Monroe Anderson worked as a reporter for The National Observer, where he covered the National Black Political Convention, a black power conference

organized in Gary, Indiana by poet Amiri Baraka and Gary Mayor Richard Hatcher. In 1974, Anderson was hired as a general assignment reporter at the Chicago Tribune, where he was one of eight African Americans. He was initially assigned to the metropolitan section, and also covered the weekly meetings of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's Operation PUSH. Anderson's award winning investigative piece about fraudulent charges at car repair shops prompted the Illinois General Assembly to pass a law protecting consumers from predatory automotive business practices. He also investigated the nutritional value of cafeteria food in the Chicago Public Schools; the discriminatory property taxes and insurance rates in African American neighborhoods, which were known as the black tax; and the criminal activities of Noah Robinson, Jr., Reverend Jesse L. Jackson's half-brother.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_008, TRT: 0:29:04  
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Monroe Anderson was a reporter at the Chicago Tribune during Richard J. Daley's mayoral administration. When Mayor Daley died in office in 1976, Michael Bilandic was appointed as his successor instead of the Chicago City Council's president pro tempore, Wilson Frost, who was African American. In 1979, Jane Byrne was elected as the mayor of Chicago, and Reverend Jesse L. Jackson led the African American community in a boycott of Byrne's ChicagoFest to show their dissatisfaction with her leadership. Around this time, Anderson began writing about Harold Washington's campaign to become Chicago's first black mayor, but was ignored by his editor until the campaign gained traction. After Washington's election, he was assigned to cover Chicago City Hall, although he preferred to report on Reverend Jackson's presidential campaign. Anderson was promoted to columnist when Vernon Jarrett left the Chicago Tribune; but, after a disagreement with editor James D. Squires, quit to work for Newsweek magazine.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_009, TRT: 0:30:22  
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Monroe Anderson was a reporter for the Chicago Tribune during the City of Chicago's mayoral election of 1983. With Chicago Sun-Times reporter Harry Golden, Jr., Anderson served as a panelist for the first debate between mayoral candidates Jane Byrne, Richard M. Daley and Harold Washington. In 1985, Anderson joined the staff of Newsweek as a Midwest correspondent. At the magazine, he collaborated with journalist Sylvester Monroe to write the cover story 'Brothers,' which followed the lives of Monroe's childhood friends from the Robert Taylor Holmes in Chicago, Illinois. The piece was later developed into the book 'Brothers: Black and Poor - A True Story of Courage,' which was published in 1988. When Eugene Sawyer became the mayor of Chicago in 1987, Anderson was chosen as his press secretary. He initially had reservations about entering the political sector; but, with the encouragement of his wife, Joyce Owens Anderson, and television executive Johnathan Rodgers, he accepted the position.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_010, TRT: 0:30:17  
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Monroe Anderson served as the press secretary for Chicago Mayor Eugene Sawyer from 1988 to 1989. In this role, he attended social events with Mayor Sawyer, and met celebrities like Mike Tyson, Don King and Donald Trump. He also travelled to California, where he met state legislator Willie L. Brown; and Sweden, where he was a guest at a dinner held by the country's monarchs. In addition, he attended the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta,

Georgia, and assisted with Mayor Sawyer's reelection campaign. When Sawyer lost the election, Anderson was approached by U.S. Representative Cardiss Collins to serve as her press secretary, but decided to leave politics. He became the host of 'Common Ground,' a public affairs talk show produced by Chicago's WBBM-TV. There, he worked with executive Johnathan Rodgers, and interviewed Mamie Till-Mobley, the mother of Emmett Till; civil rights activist Rosa Parks; and U.S. Senator Carol Moseley Braun.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_011, TRT: 0:30:40  
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Monroe Anderson was the host and executive producer of 'Common Ground,' a public affairs talk show on WBBM-TV in Chicago, Illinois, where he once interviewed basketball player Magic Johnson. Anderson worked at WBBM-TV for thirteen years before retiring at fifty-five years old. At that time, he began writing a novel about the first wave of black journalists in Chicago's mainstream media. He also contributed a chapter to Paul M. Green and Melvin G. Holli's 'Restoration 1989: Chicago Elects a New Daley,' which was republished as an article in Hermene Hartman's N'DIGO magazine. Hartman then invited Anderson to become the editor of the magazine, and he joined the staff in 2003. He also served as the editor of Savoy magazine; and, after it ceased production, wrote a political commentary column for the Chicago Sun-Times. Anderson was a founding member of the National Association of Black Journalists' Chicago chapter. He also recalls the suicide of his friend and longtime colleague, journalist Leanita McClain.

Video Oral History Interview with Monroe Anderson, Section A2006\_144\_002\_012, TRT: 0:30:08  
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Monroe Anderson describes his family, including his wife, artist Joyce Owens Anderson; and their two sons, Scott Anderson and Kyle Anderson. He also talks about his friend, journalist Leanita McClain, who committed suicide in 1984. Anderson shares his plans for the future; and reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.