

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Erroll Davis, Jr.

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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>	Davis, Erroll, 1944-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr.,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 17, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:09:04).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education administrator Erroll Davis, Jr. (1944 - ) served as the chancellor of the University System of Georgia and was appointed superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools in 2011. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2012, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_251
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Education administrator Erroll Brown Davis, Jr. was born on August 5, 1944 and grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. While Davis had a close relationship with his parents, Erroll, Sr. and Eleanor, his strongest influence as a child was his grandfather, John Boykin, a Georgia farmer who had migrated to Pittsburgh and worked as a chauffeur. Davis graduated from high school at age sixteen, and then worked his way through Carnegie-Mellon University, becoming, along with his sister Diana who graduated the same year, the first members of his family to graduate from college. Davis received his B.S. degree in electrical engineering from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1965 at the age of twenty. He moved to Chicago for graduate school, receiving his M.B.A. degree in finance from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business in 1967.

Following his graduation from Chicago, Davis worked briefly at ARCO, an international oil company, and then spent two years as an U.S. Army officer during the Vietnam War. In 1969, Davis joined the Ford Motor Company as a systems analyst. He later spent five years working in corporate finance at Xerox Corporation. Davis worked for Ford Motor Company until 1973, when he left for a position in Stamford, CT with Xerox Corporation, with whom he was affiliated until 1978. At Xerox, his focus was on strategic financial planning. Prior to the creation of Alliant Energy, Davis worked at Wisconsin Power and Light Company (WPL). From 1978 to 1990, Davis received several promotions through the senior management ranks at WPL, starting as vice president of finance and ending as CEO and President.

Davis' higher education experience includes serving as a member of the University of the Wisconsin System Board of Regents from 1987 to 1994, and as a former chairman of the board of trustees of Carnegie Mellon University, where he is a life member. From 2006 to 2011, Davis served as chancellor of the University System of Georgia. He was appointed superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools in July of 2011. He is a member of the board of directors of General Motors and Union Pacific Corp., and serves on the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) board and on the advisory board of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) along with numerous professional

associations and civic organizations. He is a former member of the U.S. Olympic Committee Board (2004-2008) and the University of Chicago Board of Trustees.

Davis is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including recognition as one of the *Atlanta Business Chronicle's* "100 Most Influential Atlantans," one of the "75 Most Powerful Blacks in Corporate America" by *Black Enterprise Magazine*. Davis also was named one of the "50 Most Powerful Black Executives in America" by *Fortune Magazine* in 2002 and received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business in 1993. In addition, Davis was honored by the magazine *U.S. Black Engineer* as the "Black Engineer of the Year" in 1988.

Davis and his wife, Elaine, live and in work in Atlanta, Georgia.

Erroll B. Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 17, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Erroll Davis, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 17, 2012, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Education administrator Erroll Davis, Jr. (1944 - ) served as the chancellor of the University System of Georgia and was appointed superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools in 2011.

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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:

Davis, Erroll, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Davis, Erroll, 1944- --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:

Education Administrator

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Erroll Davis, Jr., December 17, 2012. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:14 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. was born on August 5, 1944 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Eleanor Boykin Davis and Erroll Davis, Sr. His maternal great-grandfather, Dolar Boykin, was a farmer in LaGrange, Georgia. There, Davis' maternal grandfather, John Boykin, Sr., met and married Salima Malone Boykin. Davis' mother was also born in LaGrange, and moved to Pittsburgh with her parents during the 1930s. She earned a high school diploma in Pittsburgh, and completed one semester of college at the Hampton Institute in Virginia. Davis' father was born in North Carolina and attended the University of Pittsburgh. There, he was removed from the football team because of his aspiration to play quarterback, a position that had never been held by an African American player. Davis' father went on to work for the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company and the Pittsburgh Courier, and later served as a state legislator. Davis was born in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh, and moved at a young age to the Homewood neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:47 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. was raised by his parents, Eleanor Boykin Davis and Erroll Davis, Sr., in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He grew up in the Homewood neighborhood during the 1950s, and witnessed the ad hoc segregation of theaters and swimming pools after the city's public accommodations were formally integrated. Davis began his education two years early, when his older sister, Diana Davis Ward, entered kindergarten. As a result, he was advanced for his age, and skipped several grades. Outside of school, Davis belonged to a Cub Scout troop, and delivered newspapers to earn extra money. He went on to attend Westinghouse Junior Senior High School, where he played catcher on the baseball team. He graduated from high school at sixteen years old. Additionally, Davis describes the racial demographics of Homewood, which lost many of its German and Italian residents to white flight and became a majority-black community by the time of his graduation.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:36 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. attended Westinghouse Junior Senior High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During the seventh grade, he developed a crush on his teacher, Dorothy L. Madgett; and, the following year, he met his future wife, Elaine Davis. Davis graduated from high school in 1961, and enrolled at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. He initially studied physics, but decided to pursue a more lucrative career and changed his major to electrical engineering. During his undergraduate years, Davis spent most of his free time at the Data Storage Systems Center, where he worked with computer science pioneers Allen Newell, Alan Perlis and Herbert A. Simon. However, after completing his bachelor's degree, Davis left the field of computer science and sought an M.B.A. degree. In 1967, he was admitted to the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business with a full scholarship and additional stipend. He married his wife the following year.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:45 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. enrolled at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business in 1967. He studied with many of the leading economic scholars, including Sidney Davidson, Eugene Fama, Merton Miller, Milton Friedman and

Robert Hamada. He also frequented the black barbershops on the South Side of Chicago, and became more conscious of his identity as an African American. Upon completing his M.B.A. degree, Davis lived for a time in Los Angeles, California, where he worked for the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). He was a graduate of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and enlisted in the U.S. Army at the start of the Vietnam War. Davis worked in logistics and systems development at the U.S. Army Tank-automotive and Armaments Command in Warren, Michigan. He planned to pursue a military career; but, after his request for combat deployment was denied, he left to work in the finance division of the Ford Motor Company in 1969. Four years later, Davis was recruited to join the Xerox Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:22 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. joined the Xerox Corporation in 1973. He worked at the company's offices in Trumbull, Connecticut and Rochester, New York until 1978, when he was offered the position of CFO at the Wisconsin Power and Light Company. He moved to Madison, Wisconsin, and worked at the utility company for nearly three decades, becoming CEO during the early 1990s. In 1995, the Wisconsin Power and Light Company was subsumed under a holding company called WPL Holdings, Inc. Three years later, Davis initiated a three-way corporate merger with the Interstate Power Company and IES Industries, Inc., which produced the Alliant Energy Corporation. During his career in the energy industry, Davis served on the boards of the Amoco Corporation and BP P.L.C. In 2006, he accepted the chancellorship of the University System of Georgia, where he worked to implement performance standards across the system's thirty-five institutions. In 2011, Davis was named the interim superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_006, TRT: 6:35:30 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. became the interim superintendent of the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) in 2011, and was permanently appointed to the position after a cheating scandal surfaced in connection with the previous superintendent. Over 200 APS teachers and 40 principals were suspended for their involvement, and the majority of them were terminated. At this point in the interview, Davis talks about his work as superintendent, including his efforts to correct the problems in the disciplinary and academic systems that impeded the education of African American youth. He shares his perspective on the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and describes his plans for retirement. Davis also talks about his wife, Elaine Davis; and their children, Christopher Davis and Whitney Davis. He reflects upon his life and legacy, as well as his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Davis concludes this part of the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Erroll Davis, Jr., Section A2012\_251\_001\_007, TRT: 7:06:50 ?

Erroll Davis, Jr. narrates his photographs.