

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reuben K. Harpole

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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>	Harpole, Reuben, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 21, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:43:39).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Academic administrator and foundation executive Reuben K. Harpole (1934 - ) served at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education for thirty-one years as a senior outreach specialist at the University Center for Urban Community Development and as the program officer for the Helen Bader Foundation. Harpole was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 21, 2017, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_059
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Academic administrator and foundation executive Reuben K. Harpole was born on September 4, 1934 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Reuben K. Harpole, Sr. and Mardree Johnson Harpole. He graduated from North Division High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and earned his B.S. degree in elementary education in 1978 from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Harpole served at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education for thirty-one years as a senior outreach specialist at the University Center for Urban Community Development. In 1998, he went to work as a program officer for the Helen Bader Foundation (now Bader Philanthropies, Inc.), where he spearheaded the selection of 758 grants totaling more than \$6.4 million. In 2007, Harpole established the Reuben K. Harpole Jr. Education Scholarship at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which invested \$19,000 in the college education of young African American men interested in teaching.

Harpole served as a civil rights worker and community leader who led development efforts for several Milwaukee institutions including the Black Holocaust Museum, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Urban Community Development, and the Harambee Community Development Corporation. Harpole is credited for his contributions to the founding of more than twenty-five community centers and programs that promote education including Milwaukee Public Schools' Homework First program, the Milwaukee Community Sailing Center, 100 Black Men of Greater Milwaukee, and Bader Philanthropies' Community Partnerships for Youth.

He was the recipient of numerous awards and honors for his dedicated civic work and promotion of education. In 2005, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee awarded Harpole an honorary doctorate degree of humane letters for his work in improving Milwaukee communities. On September 21, 2009, he was honored as the official "Paramount Chief of Milwaukee" and received a portion of Second Street, near North Avenue. Milwaukee named

the section of Second Street, “Reuben K. Harpole, Jr. Avenue.” In 2015, Harpole and his wife, were awarded the first Distinguished Educator of the Year award at Celebrate Teachers & Teaching. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Alumni Association honored Harpole with its Community Service Award in 2016.

Harpole and his wife, Mildred Cowan Harpole, have two children: Annette and John.

Reuben Harpole was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 21, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reuben K. Harpole was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 21, 2017, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Academic administrator and foundation executive Reuben K. Harpole (1934 - ) served at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Continuing Education for thirty-one years as a senior outreach specialist at the University Center for Urban Community Development and as the program officer for the Helen Bader Foundation.

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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:

Harpole, Reuben, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Harpole, Reuben, 1934- --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:

Academic Administrator

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Foundation Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Reuben K. Harpole, February 21, 2017. 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 Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_001, TRT: 1:31:46 ?

Reuben Harpole was born on September 4, 1934 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Mardee Johnson Harpole and Reuben Harpole, Sr. His mother was born near Little Rock, Arkansas, where she lived until her family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin when she was a teenager. In Milwaukee, her father, James Johnson, worked at the Wisconsin Grey Iron Foundry Company, and started his own bicycle rental business. Harpole's father was born in Bigelow, Arkansas, where his family owned a farm. He moved to Kansas City, Kansas to complete his secondary education, and went on to attend the Wisconsin State College of Milwaukee. Harpole's parents met and married in Milwaukee, but separated when Harpole was eight years old, and his father moved to Detroit, Michigan. Harpole and his two siblings were raised by their mother and maternal grandfather in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Milwaukee, where he attended Ninth Street School. Harpole describes the local black owned businesses like the Regal Theatre and Deacon Jones' Chicken Shack.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:01 ?

Reuben Harpole grew up in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where popular blues and jazz artists, like Billy Wallace, performed at Thelma's Back Door and the Flame club. At this point in the interview, Harpole describes local radio personality and promoter O.C. White and black police sergeant Felmers O. Chaney. As a member of Mount Calvary Holy Church of America, Harpole was discouraged from participating in competitive sports so he focused on his studies at Roosevelt Junior High School instead. He also helped his maternal grandfather, James Johnson, operate his bike rental business until his death. At North Division High School, Harpole initially struggled to maintain his grades, but eventually excelled in chemistry and biology after improving his study skills. While in high school, he worked at Stark's General Cleaners, where he was mentored by the owner. After graduation, Harpole worked at the American Can Company before being drafted into the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:06 ?

Reuben Harpole was drafted into the U.S. military during the Korean War. While stationed in Korea, he learned to play the saxophone, and formed a band that included Lee Tucker of the Modern Jazz Disciples. Harpole returned to the United States in 1959, and enrolled at Milwaukee Area Technical College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There, he met and married his wife, Mildred Harpole. Disappointed by the overt racial discrimination in the city, Harpole joined the Milwaukee Urban League. He worked with Mayor Frank P. Ziedler and Professor Belden Paulson to educate citizens about community development initiatives. Together they started the Central City Teacher Community Project, which facilitated discussions between parents and teachers about the community's educational needs. In 1967, Harpole helped establish twenty-five tutorial centers around the city. He also served as the advertising manager for the Milwaukee Star newspaper, where he met Ferne Yangyeitie Caulker who later founded the Ko-Thi Dance Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_004, TRT:

4:30:59 ?

Reuben Harpole met with government officials to ease community tensions after a march against discriminatory housing practices in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin in 1967. In the 1960s, he and Joe White founded the summer prep program at Campion High School in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. The program offered college preparatory courses and basketball lessons to children from underserved communities. During that time, Harpole pursued his bachelor's degree in education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and graduated in 1978. Through his work in the community, Harpole helped individuals like former Miss Black America Sonya Robinson, and media mogul Oprah Winfrey, whom he recommended for enrollment at Nicolet High School in Glendale, Wisconsin. When Gary George assumed his seat in the Wisconsin State Senate in 1981, Harpole encouraged him to improve the economic development in the minority communities. In 1988, Harpole worked with the founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum, James Cameron.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_005, TRT: 5:25:14 ?

Reuben Harpole introduced James Cameron to Daniel J. Bader of the Helen Bader Foundation, who was an early investor of the America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Harpole helped secure additional funding and the museum opened in 1988. Harpole also served on the Ko-Thi Dance Company's first board, which was founded by Ferne Yangyeitie. After participating in Anthony Mensah's Rites of Passage program as an undergraduate student, Harpole decided to continue his involvement with the Asentu Rites of Passage Institute, Inc., which sought to infuse African traditions with cooperative education principals. In addition to his community work, Harpole was a lifetime member of the NAACP. Starting in 1966, Harpole worked as a senior outreach specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Shortly after his retirement in 1997, he and his wife, Mildred Harpole, established the Reuben K. Harpole, Jr. Scholarship fund at the university. In 1999, he accepted a position at the Helen Bader Foundation.

Video Oral History Interview with Reuben K. Harpole, Section A2017\_059\_001\_006, TRT: 6:16:33 ?

Reuben Harpole founded Homework Comes First, which was an after school program that motivated students to finish their assignments through a number of incentives and prizes. At its peak, nearly forty six schools participated with over six thousand children involved. However, due to a lack of support from the schools, the funding was cut and the program ended. After his retirement from the Helen Bader Foundation in 2010, Harpole continued his work with Anthony Mensah's Rites of Passage program. He also partnered with his wife, Mildred Harpole, who was a community leader and principal of Milwaukee's Harambee Community School. Together, the couple had two children, John Harpole and Annette Harpole. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life.