

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lionel McMurren

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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>	McMurren, Lionel, 1925-2010
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 15, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:27:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Junior high school principal Lionel McMurren (1925 - 2012 ) is the former deputy superintendent of the New York Public Schools. McMurren was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 15, 2003, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_194
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lionel McMurren was born in Harlem, New York, on October 21, 1925. At the age of two, his mother died and he was raised by two aunts in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and also by a great aunt in New York. McMurren attended public school in New York and went on to attend Brooklyn College. Because he was drafted in 1944 and served in the Pacific Rim Theater, McMurren did not complete his A.B. from Brooklyn until 1949. A year later, he went on to earn an M.S. from City Colleges of New York. In 1968, he received a professional diploma in instructional administration and a Ph.D. in 1980, both from Fordham University.

McMurren began his professional career in 1951, working as a health education community center teacher. In 1954, at the Methodist Camp Service, McMurren provided summer camp opportunities for inner-city youth. He did this for twenty years, both full and part time, rising eventually to the position of executive director. Also in 1954, McMurren returned to the junior high school of his youth, Frederick Douglass Junior High School, where he showed a particular talent in working with youth. Over the next ten years, McMurren would rise to dean of students and acting assistant principal. In 1964, McMurren took another position as a guidance counselor at a junior high school in Manhattan, and in 1966 he became the assistant principal of P.S. 78 Elementary School. Returning to Frederick Douglass, McMurren assumed the position of principal in 1969, and remained there until 1982.

McMurren was promoted to deputy superintendent of schools of New York in 1982, and remained there until 1986. McMurren continued to work in education even after leaving his post, both as a consultant and as associate professor at City Colleges of New York. In 2005, McMurren completed an autobiographical account of his experiences at Frederick Douglass, entitled Frederick Douglass P.S. 139: A Citadel of Inspiration--its Aura and Impact : a Story of a Harlem School.

Beyond his years as an educator, McMurren was active in social and civic organizations. He held numerous positions with St. Mark's Methodist Church after first becoming involved in 1940. He was a member of several

fraternal organizations, and has been involved with the Minority Task Force on AIDS.

McMurren's former wife, Dorothy, died in 1987. He later remarried and moved, with his wife, Jean, to Sarasota, Florida.

Lionel McMurren passed away on January 22, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lionel McMurren was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 15, 2003, in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Junior high school principal Lionel McMurren (1925 - 2012 ) is the former deputy superintendent of the New York Public Schools.

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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:

McMurren, Lionel, 1925-2010

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McMurren, Lionel, 1925-2010 --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:

Junior High School Principal

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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 Lionel McMurren, August 15, 2003. 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 Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:21  
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Lionel McMurren was born on October 21, 1925. His mother, Bertha Ramsome McMurren, who was born in Plymouth, North Carolina, passed away when he was two years old. His father, Noah Edison McMurren, was born in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. He was a World War I veteran who dreamed of becoming a doctor or dentist. He graduated from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in the early 1920s, but couldn't afford medical school, so he found a job in New York City at the post office. McMurren remembers his father as a strict man. Following his mother's death, McMurren was sent to live with two aunts in Elizabeth City, and later, with his great-aunt Priscilla Manly in New York City. There, he lived in an apartment on the fifth floor with many of his cousins. He remembers the busy streets, playing with his cousins and the smell of smoke during his childhood. He was a bright child who attended P.S. 5, Alexander Webb Elementary School in Harlem. McMurren moved back in with his father when he was eight.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:16  
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Lionel McMurren's favorite teacher at P.S. 5, Alexander Webb Elementary School in Harlem, New York, New York was Mr. Amatrano, who taught through song and instilled a sense of pride in his students in class 6A-1. There, McMurren excelled in math. In 7th grade, McMurren attended Frederick Douglass Junior High School in New York City. Douglass Junior High School was opened by Robert S. Dixon in 1924 as a boys' school. In junior high, McMurren had many great teachers who taught him respect and how to memorize things, such as the poem 'Invictus', by William Ernest Henley, which McMurren recites. At DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York, New York, McMurren aspired to be a psychiatrist because of his interest in people. He attempted to fulfill his ambition after graduating from Brooklyn College in New York City, but was not accepted to medical school. Instead, he later got a master's degree in clinical school psychology from City Colleges of New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:16  
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Lionel McMurren attended DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, New York City where he made lifelong friends. In high school, he did well academically and his father suggested he become a teacher. McMurren attended Brooklyn College in New York City, until he was drafted to serve in the U.S. Army in the China Burma India Theater during World War II. He served alongside white soldiers while overseas, but was confronted with the realities of segregation when he returned to the American South. He describes the difference between the Air Corps and the U.S. Army Air Force, which included some of his friends who were Tuskegee Airmen. McMurren graduated from Brooklyn College in 1949 and went to work at the Lafargue Clinic, the first mental hygiene clinic in Harlem. He then became director of the Methodist Camp Service. During that time he was offered a position teaching math and Spanish at Frederick Douglass Junior High School. He was made dean after just two years teaching.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:05  
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Lionel McMurren handled disciplinary cases as dean at Frederick Douglass Junior High School in New York, New York. His approach was to have a conversation with the children, which was very successful. McMurren became assistant principal and was selected by the New York Board of Education to

attend the Instructional Administrator's Program at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York, under a Ford Foundation grant to train minority supervisors. The program equipped him well for his next job, as principal of the new Frederick Douglass Intermediate School 10, in New York City. This new school was to include girls in its population of two thousand sixth to eighth graders from the neighborhood. As principal, McMurren had colleagues he could go to for advice and he built a team of administrators who all shared the goal of having a well-run school where students could learn. McMurren describes the discrimination against minority teachers in the New York City public School system during this time.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:28  
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Lionel McMurren sings the school song of Frederick Douglass Intermediate School 10, in Harlem, New York City. After he was appointed the first principal of Douglass, McMurren held conferences, the summer before the school opened, with the teachers about the objectives of the school. While he was principal, HistoryMaker Dr. Eugene Webb, of Webb & Brooker Inc., adopted the school and brought figures such as former New York Mayors John Lindsay and Ed Koch, and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and his wife, to visit Douglass. McMurren also built a relationship with Walton H. Marshall who provided a scholarship for Douglass students to attend Orme School in Mayer, Arizona. In 1982, McMurren was appointed deputy superintendent of schools of New York. As deputy superintendent, he trained principals and assistant principals and developed a campaign to improve schools in central Harlem. McMurren reflects upon the legacy of Douglass Intermediate School 10 and describes his hopes for Harlem students and schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:16  
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Lionel McMurren decided to retire in 1986, following advice from the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators. In retirement, he became more active in organizations like St. Mark's United Methodist Church in New York, New York, with HistoryMaker Calvin O. Pressley; Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity also known as the Boulé; and, the Addiction Research Treatment Corporation [ARTC], founded by HistoryMaker Dr. Beny J. Primm, which later became, START Treatment and Recovery Centers. In his free-time, McMurren wants to read more, play bridge, spend time with his wife, Jean McMurren, and write a book about his experiences as principal of Frederick Douglass Intermediate School 10, in Harlem, New York City. McMurren reflects upon what it means to be a good educator, his love for Harlem, and his legacy. He recites 'Invictus,' by William Ernest Henley and narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Lionel McMurren, Section A2003\_194\_001\_007, TRT: 0:23:07  
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Lionel McMurren narrates his photographs.