

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ralph Simpson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Simpson, Ralph, 1963-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson,
Dates:	December 15, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:31:10).
Abstract:	High school principal Ralph Simpson (1963 -) was the first African American principal in the history of Stone Mountain, Georgia, serving as principal of Stone Mountain High School. Simpson was also the first principal of Miller Grove High School. Simpson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2006, in Lithonia, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_175
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

High school principal Ralph Simpson was born on December 14, 1963 in Atlanta, Georgia to Roxie and Harry Simpson. Simpson was an average student and attended the Atlanta Public Schools and graduated from Southwest High School. Simpson enrolled in West Georgia College and received his B.A degree in criminal justice in 1986.

After graduation, Simpson worked for the Georgia State Department of Corrections for four years to become a teacher. He was employed with the DeKalb County Board of Education. In the DeKalb School System, he experienced tremendous success as a teacher, mentor, and leader.

Simpson returned to West Georgia College to pursue his M.A. degree in administration and supervision. In 1996, Simpson was promoted to assistant principal of discipline, instruction, and attendance at Miller Grove Middle School in Lithonia, Georgia. In 1998, Simpson was assigned to Stone Mountain High School as the assistant principal of discipline, and in 2000, Simpson became the first African American principal in the history of Stone Mountain, Georgia. Simpson earned his Ph.D. in educational leadership at the University of Sarasota in February of 2004.

Simpson became the first principal of Miller Grove High School, which is the largest high school in DeKalb County, Georgia. He is involved in several professional and public service organizations. Among these are the National Association of Educators, Georgia Association of Educators, DeKalb Association of Secondary School Administrators, and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ralph Simpson was conducted by Denise Gines on December 15, 2006, in

Lithonia, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school principal Ralph Simpson (1963 -) was the first African American principal in the history of Stone Mountain, Georgia, serving as principal of Stone Mountain High School. Simpson was also the first principal of Miller Grove High School.

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:

Simpson, Ralph, 1963-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Simpson, Ralph, 1963- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

High School Principal

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 Ralph Simpson, December 15, 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).

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 Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Ralph Simpson was born on December 14, 1963 in Atlanta, Georgia to Roxie Shannon Simpson and Henry Simpson, Jr. His maternal grandparents, Roxie Shannon and Arthur Shannon, raised twelve children on their farm in Forsyth, Georgia. Simpson's maternal grandmother ran the farm, while his maternal grandfather worked on the railroad in Fort Valley, Georgia. His paternal grandparents, Maggie Simpson and Henry Simpson, Sr., owned a farm in Washington, Georgia, and his paternal grandfather was also a deacon at a local church. Simpson's parents moved to Atlanta after graduating from high school. His mother worked for The Lovable Co. and then J.C. Penney Company, and his father was employed by The Varsity restaurant and then General Motors Corporation. Simpson was born early in his parents' marriage, when his mother

was twenty years old, and had a maternal aunt and uncle who were his age. He grew up with his parents, who were disciplinarians, and his older brother, Henry Simpson III, in Atlanta's Grove Park Apartments.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Ralph Simpson grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, where he and his older brother, Henry Simpson III, watched 'The Little Rascals' and The Three Stooges on television. He sometimes attended Jackson Memorial Baptist Church with his mother, but his family was not involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Simpson began his education at the private Haugabrooks Academy, but transferred to public schools after one year. He then attended Atlanta's Grove Park Elementary School, Carter G. Woodson Elementary School and Beecher Hills Elementary School. Simpson was often scolded for talking in class. He feared calls home to his mother, Roxie Shannon Simpson, as his parents were strict disciplinarians. He was an average student, and frequently took summer school classes. Simpson attended Southwest High School from 1976, where he increasingly had difficulty in his classes, especially mathematics. Simpson also joined the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps, and was promoted to drill team commander in his senior year.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Ralph Simpson attended Southwest High School in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was a photographer for the yearbook and newspaper, and listened to rap artists like Public Enemy and KRS-One. He also volunteered on the search crews during the Atlanta Missing and Murdered Children cases. After graduation, Simpson worked part time at McDonald's, and considered entering the U.S. Marine Corps. He eventually applied and was accepted to West Georgia College in Carrollton, where he took remedial classes during his first year. Simpson was on academic probation, but improved his grades in order to join Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. He majored in criminal justice, and was mentored by Professor John R. Fuller. Simpson graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1986, and became a corrections officer at Metro Correctional Institution in Decatur, Georgia. The writings of Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu inspired Simpson to become a role model for African American boys, and he began teaching fifth grade at Main Street Elementary School in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_004, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Ralph Simpson was a friend of Danny Buggs, founder of a mentorship program called The Winning Circle, and started a chapter of Buggs' program while teaching at Main Street Elementary School. Simpson was laid off after the school's enrollment dropped; but, due to protests from parents who valued him as a role model, was hired by the same district to teach at Miller Grove Middle School. Although he did not score well on graduate admissions tests, he was able to enter a master's degree program at the University of West Georgia on probationary status, and graduated in 1996 with an A average. Simpson was hired as an assistant principal at Stone Mountain High School; and, in 2000, became the school's first African American principal. At Stone Mountain, he stressed advanced classes, and a dress code for students and staff. Simpson's leadership style was influenced by the Nation of Islam and the movie 'Lean on Me.' In 2004, he received a doctoral degree in educational leadership from Florida's University of Sarasota.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_005, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Ralph Simpson was chosen to be the first principal of Miller Grove High School in Lithonia, Georgia when the school opened in 2005. He was involved in the creation of the school's crest, alma mater and mission statement. Miller Grove

High School was the largest facility in the DeKalb County School District, with specialized laboratories for culinary arts, video production, and health occupations. Because the school was on the needs improvement list under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, Simpson organized the teachers to protest outside the school for several days, to demand parents take a more active role in their students' education. He also trained several classroom teachers, such as Carol Thedford, for roles as school administrators. Simpson had two children, Chandler Simpson and Skyla Simpson. He describes his goals to become a superintendent and to travel internationally as a speaker on issues of education. Simpson also reflects upon his life, legacy and his hopes for the future of education.

Video Oral History Interview with Ralph Simpson, Section A2006_175_001_006, TRT: 0:04:01 ?

Ralph Simpson often hired former classroom teaching staff as his assistant principals. James H. Jones and Latashia Searcy were classroom teachers at Stone Mountain High School when Simpson was principal there, and were later hired as Simpson's assistant principals at Miller Grove High School in Lithonia, Georgia. Simpson concludes the interview by describing the support of the DeKalb County Board of Education in his efforts to increase parental involvement in students' educations.