

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George McKenna, III

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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>	McKenna, George
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George McKenna, III,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 24, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:04:18).
<b>Abstract:</b>	High school principal George McKenna, III (1940 - ) is an education reformer whose tactics have been modeled in schools nationwide. McKenna became principal of George Washington Preparatory High School in 1979, and famously turned it from one of the most notorious and violent schools in Los Angeles into a school where nearly eighty percent of its graduates went on to college. McKenna was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 24, 2001, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_048
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

George McKenna III was born in New Orleans into a family that was steeped deeply in the culture and history of the city. At the age of twenty, he received a B.A. in mathematics from Xavier University and was awarded a teaching fellowship to Loyola University, where he earned an M.A. in mathematics. He also holds a doctor of education degree from Xavier University.

In 1962, McKenna accepted a teaching position in the Los Angeles Unified School District. While continuing his education at Loyola University Law School, the University of California, Los Angeles and California State University at Los Angeles, McKenna remained a teacher, working at both the secondary and college levels.

McKenna became principal of George Washington Preparatory High School in 1979. At the time, this high school was one of the most notorious and violent in Los Angeles, replete with gangs, drug dealing and gun fights. McKenna and his reform tactics turned George Washington Preparatory High School around, transforming it from a failing institution to one where nearly eighty percent of its graduates went on to college.

McKenna's programs have been modeled throughout the nation. He has served as a consultant to numerous school districts and law enforcement agencies. He is also the author of several articles that have appeared in local and national newspapers and educational journals. McKenna has received more than 400 citations and awards from civic, legislative and professional organizations. His work led to his being the subject of the award-winning CBS movie, *The George McKenna Story*, starring Denzel Washington.

In 1989, McKenna received the Congressional Black Caucus' Chairman's Award and in 1997 was elected into the National Alliance of Black School Educators' Hall of Fame.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George McKenna, III was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 24, 2001, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school principal George McKenna, III (1940 - ) is an education reformer whose tactics have been modeled in schools nationwide. McKenna became principal of George Washington Preparatory High School in 1979, and famously turned it from one of the most notorious and violent schools in Los Angeles into a school where nearly eighty percent of its graduates went on to college.

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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:

McKenna, George

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McKenna, George--Interviews

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African American school administrators--California--Los Angeles--Interviews

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African-American families--Louisiana--New Orleans

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New Orleans (La.)--Race relations

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Segregation--Southern States

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Los Angeles (Calif.)--Social life and customs

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Watts Riot, Los Angeles, Calif., 1965

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Public schools--United States

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High school principals--California--Los Angeles

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Educational innovations--United States

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Education, Urban--United States

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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:**

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 George McKenna, III, July 24, 2001. 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 George McKenna, III, Section A2001\_048\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:03 ?

Teacher and high school principal George McKenna describes his family background, detailing the personalities and achievements of his grandfather, father, and mother. McKenna shares memories from his childhood growing up in New Orleans, Louisiana, and describes his family life. McKenna recalls segregation and discrimination in the South, and also discusses the skin-color prejudice of Creoles in New Orleans. McKenna also describes his favorite activities and recreations from childhood, and briefly describes his education.

African American school administrators--California--Los Angeles--Interviews.  
African American families--Louisiana--New Orleans.  
New Orleans (La.)--Race relations.  
Segregation--Southern States.  
Los Angeles (Calif.)--Social life and customs.  
Watts Riot, Los Angeles, Calif., 1965.  
Public schools--United States.  
High school principals--California--Los Angeles.  
Educational innovations--United States.  
Education, Urban--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with George McKenna, III, Section A2001\_048\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Teacher and high school principal George McKenna describes his graduate education and the early part of his professional career. In particular, McKenna focuses on the message of empowerment he learned, and explains how he passed this message on to his students. McKenna describes his moves from New Orleans to Chicago to Los Angeles, and talks about how he adjusted to these changing environments.

Video Oral History Interview with George McKenna, III, Section A2001\_048\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:07 ?

Teacher and high school principal George McKenna describes the effects of the Watts riots of 1965, explaining how they changed Los Angeles's demographics forever. McKenna then shares his personal views on the importance of public

schools and the many ways public schools can have an impact on children and society. To illustrate his points, McKenna uses his own experience as principal of George Washington Preparatory High School. McKenna talks about the various challenges he encountered at Washington High School and explains the solutions he implemented to improve the lives of his students and teachers.

Video Oral History Interview with George McKenna, III, Section A2001\_048\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Teacher and high school principal George McKenna further describes his success as principal of George Washington Preparatory High School in Los Angeles, and discusses the increasing publicity that resulted. McKenna talks about the circumstances leading to a movie based on his life, *The George McKenna Story*, starring Denzel Washington. McKenna discusses his plans for the future as an educator, and provides a vision for the success of public education everywhere. He also considers his legacy and what his first principal would think about him now.