

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Matthew Little

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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>	Little, Matthew, 1921-2014
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 11, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:54:01).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Association branch chief executive and civil rights activist Matthew Little (1921 - 2014 ) was the head of the Minnesota NAACP. Little was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2002, in Maplewood, Minnesota. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_145
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights advocate Matthew Little has been one of Minnesota's most prominent black leaders. He was born on August 21, 1921 in Washington, North Carolina. As a youth he promised his parents he would become a doctor. Shortly after graduating from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in 1943, Little was drafted. After World War II, Little, an excellent student, could not get into medical school. Severely depressed, and ashamed he wanted to get to the northernmost, coldest place he could find. He flipped a coin at the bus station and headed for Minneapolis, instead of Denver and for a year his family searched desperately for him. A year later, he picked up the phone and his mother said, "Brother, is that you?"

Leaving the formal version of segregation in the South behind him, Little settled in Minneapolis where he worked as a waiter in a hotel and at the local post office. When he sought a position as a firefighter, racial discrimination prevented his hiring and he learned a lesson about the north. Eventually, Little started his own successful landscaping business.

Little has been active in civil right efforts for over fifty years. As president of the Minnesota chapter of the NAACP, Little organized busloads of Minnesota activists for the historic 1963 March On Washington. He has rallied for continued support of affirmative action and desegregation of the Minnesota Public Schools. He supported the NAACP lawsuit against the government of Minnesota, which charged the public school system with failing to provide an equal education to all children. Little supported busing as the best solution to the problem of school inequality, which has placed him at odds with some local black politicians as well as the white ones. He cultivated a strong relationship and influence with the African American community and the business community and was instrumental in persuading the Minnesota Vikings management to hire Dennis Green as their first black head coach. He served as the chairman of the board of the Minnesota NAACP.

In recognition of his accomplishments and contributions to his community, Little has received numerous awards. He was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in May of 2002. Little and his wife Lucille lived in St. Paul. He passed away on January 26, 2014.

Matthew Little CivicMaker Civic Leader 141 words Unidentified/BEG

Civil rights advocate Matthew Little has been one of Minnesota's most prominent black leaders. He was born on August 21, 1921, in Washington, North Carolina. Shortly after graduating from North Carolina A&T State University in 1943, Little moved to Minneapolis, where he continues to reside. Little was active in civil right efforts for more than fifty years. Formerly a president of the Minnesota chapter of the NAACP, Little then acted as its chairman. He rallied for continued support of affirmative action and desegregation. He supported the NAACP lawsuit against the government of Minnesota, which charged the public school system with failing to provide an equal education to all children. In recognition of his accomplishments and contributions to his community, Little was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in May 2002.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Matthew Little was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 11, 2002, in Maplewood, Minnesota, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Association branch chief executive and civil rights activist Matthew Little (1921 - 2014 ) was the head of the Minnesota NAACP.

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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:

Little, Matthew, 1921-2014

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Little, Matthew, 1921-2014--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:**

Civil Rights Activist

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Association Branch Chief 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 Matthew Little, August 11, 2002. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Matthew Little, Section A2002\_145\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 2002/08/11

Matthew Little describes his family background. His mother, Bessie Parmley Little, was born in 1896 and his father, Arthur James Little, was born in 1898, both in Washington, North Carolina. Little's paternal great-grandfather was an indentured servant who purchased his freedom and worked as an engineer on the Pamlico river, and Little's grandfather and father both worked in the gristmill in Washington, North Carolina. Little was born on August 21, 1921 and is the second of eight children. His family attended Spring Garden Baptist Church regularly. Little remembers Washington, North Carolina as a highly segregated and prejudiced city where the pavement and lights ended where the blacks lived. Little and his family accepted the mentality that they were inferior to whites until Little began to attend meetings of

the NAACP at the age of was twelve.

Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little, Section  
A2002\_145\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:35 2002/08/11

Matthew Little describes his childhood and education in Washington, North Carolina. Little attended Washington Colored High School from kindergarten through high school, where he was taught the importance of getting an education and migrating to the north. In high school, Little participated in football, basketball, track, debate, and oration, and competed yearly with other black schools on the east coast at Elizabeth City State College. When Little was twelve, he began attending meetings of the NAACP, which his father thought was a subversive organization. In 1938, Little graduated from Washington Colored High School and enrolled at North Carolina A&T University to study medicine. In 1943, Little received his B.S. degree in biology with a minor in chemistry from North Carolina A&T University and was drafted into the United States Army to fight in World War II.

Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little, Section  
A2002\_145\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:55 2002/08/11

Matthew Little describes his experiences in the United States Army during World War II and moving to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Little was inducted into the United States Army and trained at Fort Bragg, North Carolina in 1943. He was transferred to the 364 Infantry Regiment and was stationed with them in Mississippi. When the senior officers of the Third Army realized that a black division was in combat training, the 364 was sent to the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, where he participated in the invasion of the island Kiska. In 1945, Little was injured by an exploding plane and put on furlough in order to recuperate. The war ended and Little spent the remainder of his service in Seattle, Washington. In 1946, Little moved to Washington, D.C. to take refresher courses at Howard University, but after a year was denied admission into their medical school. In 1948, Little decided to move to Minneapolis where he became a fireman.

Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little, Section

A2002\_145\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2002/08/11

Matthew Little describes his Civil Rights work in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the 1950s through the 1970s. While applying for a job at the Minneapolis Fire Department, Little passed the physical and written portions of the exam but not the oral exam. Little was told by the examiners that they did not want him in the department because they did not think integration would work. Using this testimony as evidence, Little and the NAACP filed a suit against the fire department in the mid-1970s. Little took a job instead at the post office and became involved with the Minneapolis NAACP, where he was mentored by black newspaper owner Cecil Newman and earned the ear of Minnesota politicians Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and Eugene McCarthy. In 1963, Little chaired and organized a 250-person contingent from Minnesota to attend the March on Washington. Little recalls the success of the NAACP in creating Affirmative Action departments at many Fortune 500 companies in Minneapolis and Saint Paul Minnesota.

Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little, Section  
A2002\_145\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:10 2002/08/11

Matthew Little continues to describe his work as executive vice president and president of the Minneapolis NAACP. After the March on Washington, Little formed the Minnesota March on Washington Committee with the goal of getting Civil Rights legislation passed in Minnesota. This committee ensured that all Senators and Representatives voted in favor of all Civil Rights legislation and sent volunteers to support the Freedom Summer on 1964. Little also attended the Democratic National Convention in 1964, where he was witness to Hubert Humphrey's betrayal of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In 1972, Little and the NAACP sued the State of Minnesota to desegregate the Minneapolis School District, a legal battle which continued for more than thirty years. In 1992, Little was central in convincing Minnesota Vikings owner Mike Lynn to hire black cheerleaders, their first black head coach Dennis Green, and their first black defensive coordinator Tony Dungy.

Video Oral History Interview with Matthew Little, Section

Matthew Little continues to describe his work with the Minnesota NAACP and reflects upon his legacy and the civic activities of his children. After Grand Metropolitan of Britain purchased the Pillsbury Company in 1988, Little and the NAACP persuaded them to not only keep their affirmative action department but to strengthen it. Little reflects on how his children Matthea Smith Little, Azania Little, Kinshasha Bediako, Titilayo Bediako, and Stanley Little have carried on his commitment to civic leadership. He ends the interview by narrating his photographs.