

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Barbara A. Sizemore

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sizemore, Barbara A.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Barbara A. Sizemore,
Dates:	April 9, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:49).
Abstract:	Academic administrator, school superintendent, and education professor Barbara A. Sizemore (1927 - 2004) is an educational theorist and the first African American woman to become a school principal in Chicago. Sizemore was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_070
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dedicated educator and educational theorist Barbara Sizemore applies the expertise she acquired at premiere institutions to work on behalf of disadvantaged students. Sizemore was born on December 17, 1927, in Chicago. Upon completing a B.A. in classical languages at Northwestern University, she began teaching in the Chicago public school system. Sizemore returned to Northwestern and received an M.A. in elementary education in 1954. Twenty-five years later, she graduated from the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. in educational administration.

In 1963, Sizemore was among the first African American women to serve as principal of a Chicago school. Six years after switching from elementary to high school administration, she was the first African American woman elected superintendent of a major city's school system in 1972. For two years Sizemore served as the top official of the District of Columbia's public schools. She then accepted a position at the University of Pittsburgh, which she retained until 1992. At Pitt, Sizemore studied schools located in low-income, high-crime areas whose students were predominately African American. She incorporated her findings into an innovative educational strategy called School Achievement Structure (SAS), which she championed as dean of DePaul University's School of Education from 1992 to 1998. Schools that followed her routines had tremendous success raising their students' test scores, increasing these individuals' chances for success in system that often works against them.

A former member of the board of directors of The Journal of Negro Education, Sizemore continues to participate in the dialogue of how to empower students as a prolific writer and member of the National Alliance of Black School Educators. She has received numerous awards and honors recognizing her contribution to educational theory. Sizemore's children, Kymara Chase and Furman G. Sizemore, are also professors.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Barbara A. Sizemore was conducted by Adele Hodge on April 9, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator, school superintendent, and education professor Barbara A. Sizemore (1927 - 2004) is an educational theorist and the first African American woman to become a school principal in Chicago.

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:

Sizemore, Barbara A.

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Sizemore, Barbara A.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

DePaul University. School Achievement Structure

Public Schools of the District of Columbia

University of Pittsburgh. Dept. of Black Community, Education, Research,
and Development

Occupations:

Academic Administrator

School Superintendent

Education Professor

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 Barbara A. Sizemore, April 9, 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 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).

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 Barbara A. Sizemore, Section A2003_070_001_001, TRT: 1:31:08 2003/04/09

Barbara Sizemore was born on December 17, 1927 in Chicago, Illinois to Delila Mae Alexander and Sylvester Laffoon. Her paternal grandparents, William and Viola Rudy Laffoon, migrated from Kentucky to Terre Haute, Indiana where William was the first black business owner on Wabash Avenue. He ran a restaurant, where Viola Laffoon was the chief cook and he owned a barbershop. Sizemore's paternal grandparents were important fixtures in the Spruce Street A.M.E. Church in Terre Haute. Her maternal grandparents, Myrtle Mae and Jesse Alexander had fourteen children. Myrtle Mae, had a white father and passed for white. She often wrestled with her racial identity. She became one of Sizemore's primary caretakers after leaving her abusive husband. Sizemore's parents attended Indiana State Teachers College in Terre Haute, Indiana where only her father graduated. He was killed soon after her parents' divorce in 1934. The cause of death was uncertain. Sizemore talks her grade school teachers. In 1940, she moved to Evanston, Illinois after her mother married Aldwin Stewart. She describes her transition from Wiley High School in Terre Haute to the racist environment of Evanston Township High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara A. Sizemore, Section
A2003_070_001_002, TRT: 2:31:08 2003/04/09

Barbara Sizemore studied Latin, Greek, and French at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She also majored in education. By the time Sizemore graduated in 1947, she had experienced several incidents of racial discrimination on campus. After a brief stint as a substitute teacher at Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago, Illinois, Sizemore was hired at John D. Shoop Elementary School. At Shoop, Sizemore was mentored by Ella Mae Cunningham. Sizemore describes her early years as an educator and her efforts to increase her students' reading levels. Her determination to put her students' learning ahead of prolonged displays of patriotism placed Sizemore at odds with the principal at Shoop Elementary School who reported Sizemore to the FBI for teaching communism. Sizemore and her entire family were investigated for two years, but the FBI found no evidence to substantiate her principal's claims. Sizemore describes the centuries-long maltreatment of black people in the United States. She also talks about her husband, Furman Sizemore. The two were married in 1947 after her husband completed his service in the U.S. Navy.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara A. Sizemore, Section
A2003_070_001_003, TRT: 3:31:07 2003/04/09

Barbara Sizemore transferred to Gillespie Elementary School in 1954 where she was mentored as a principal by Thelma E. Gray. Sizemore then worked under principal Byron C. Minor at Charles Richard Drew Elementary School in Chicago's Princeton Park where she worked with low-performing students. In 1963, Sizemore became the principal of Dvorak Elementary School in Chicago. At Dvorak, Sizemore collaborated with assistant principal Clara Holton to create the first non-graded elementary school in Chicago. This work was inspired by educational theorists, John Goodlad and Robert Anderson. She then became the principal of Chicago's Forrestville High School where she learned to exercise her authority over students from assistant principal, Anderson Thompson. Thompson helped to clear Forrestville of gangs. Sizemore spoke of her desire to make King High School Chicago's

premiere performing arts school. This dream was never realized. She also describes tensions with Hyde Park High School principal Anna Kolheim while working with the Woodlawn Experimental Schools Project, and with James Moffat.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara A. Sizemore, Section A2003_070_001_004, TRT: 4:30:17 2003/04/09

Barbara Sizemore resigned from Chicago Public Schools in 1972 after HistoryMaker Manford Byrd declined to remove her from the supervision of his second in command, James Moffat. She moved to Washington, D.C. as the Superintendent of D.C. Public Schools from 1973 to 1975 where she underestimated the racism at the nation's capital and the U.S. Congress' control over the governance of Washington, D.C. After graduating from the University of Chicago with a Ph.D. at the age of fifty-two in 1979, Sizemore was hired as a professor in black studies at the University of Pittsburgh where she conducted studies on high-achieving schools in predominantly African American, low income, and high crime neighborhoods. In 1992, Sizemore was recruited by Gladys Styles Johnston and Carol Camp Yeakey as the Dean of the School of Education at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. Sizemore describes the pervasiveness of white supremacy in American society and Mayor Richard M. Daley's grip on Chicago city politics. She also talks about her children, Kymara Chase and Furman Sizemore.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara A. Sizemore, Section A2003_070_001_005, TRT: 5:30:09 2003/04/09

Barbara Sizemore talks about her book "Walking in Circles" which covers difficulty of educational reform. She was encouraged by many people to write the book, including Nancy Arnez, Donald H. Smith, Christella Moody, and HistoryMakers Haki Madhubuti, Charles Moody, and Asa Hilliard. Sizemore describes her campaign for city council in Washington, D.C. in 1975 after she was fired from her position as the Superintendent of D.C. Public Schools. She also reflects upon how she will be remembered, her legacy, and her career. Sizemore closes by narrating her photographs.