

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Floretta Dukes McKenzie

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | McKenzie, Floretta Dukes   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Floretta Dukes McKenzie,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | September 12, 2003   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2003   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:20:30).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | School superintendent and education consultant Floretta Dukes McKenzie (1935 - 2015 ) oversaw Public Schools of the District of Columbia from 1981 to 1988 before founding The McKenzie Group, an educational consulting firm. McKenzie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2003_253  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Floretta McKenzie has a distinguished record of more than forty years of service to education as both a school administrator and educational consultant. Born in Lakeland, Florida, on August 19, 1935, she went on to earn her B.A. degree from D.C. Teachers College in 1956 and her M.Ed. degree from Howard University in 1957 before beginning her career as a teacher in Maryland. McKenzie later rose through the Washington, D.C., school system and became deputy superintendent in 1973. In 1974, she returned to Maryland and was hired as area assistant superintendent for Montgomery County Public Schools. McKenzie worked for the U.S. Department of Education as a deputy assistant secretary in the Office of School Improvement, managing fifteen federal education discretionary programs and initiatives. She also served as the U.S. delegate to the UNESCO General Conference in Yugoslavia.

In 1981, McKenzie returned to D.C. Public Schools as the superintendent of schools and chief state school officer. In this capacity, she oversaw the country's twenty-first-largest school system, managing 89,000 students, 13,000 employees and a \$400 million budget. Under her leadership, the district established several public and private partnerships to improve instructional programs and district management. McKenzie also oversaw the implementation of the Five-Year Computer Literacy Plan, one of the country's first long-range programs for integrating technology into the public school curriculum.

McKenzie left her position in 1988 to form her own company, The McKenzie Group, an educational consulting firm. She served as its first president until 1997, when she became the company's chairperson. The McKenzie Group specializes in educational management and planning.

McKenzie served on several boards of directors, including the National Geographic Society, Marriott International, the White House Historical Association, Howard University and the Johns Hopkins Leadership Development Program. She also lectured in the American University's Graduate School of Education.

Floretta McKenzie passed away on March 23, 2015 at the age of 79.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Floretta Dukes McKenzie was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 12, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. School superintendent and education consultant Floretta Dukes McKenzie (1935 - 2015 ) oversaw Public Schools of the District of Columbia from 1981 to 1988 before founding The McKenzie Group, an educational consulting firm.

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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:

McKenzie, Floretta Dukes

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McKenzie, Floretta Dukes--Interviews

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African American school superintendents--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews

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Educational consultants--United States--Interviews

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Public Schools of the District of Columbia

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McKenzie Group

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## Occupations:

School Superintendent

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Education Consultant

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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 Floretta Dukes McKenzie, September 12, 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Floretta Dukes McKenzie, Section A2003\_253\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Floretta Dukes McKenzie was born on August 19, 1935 in Lakeland, Florida. Her mother, Ruth Jeter Dukes, was born January 18th, 1912 near Spartanburg, South Carolina and orphaned by the age of twelve. After her parents' deaths, McKenzie's mother moved to live with an aunt in Florida. McKenzie's father, Martin Walter Dukes, was born August 8th, 1909 in Central Florida. His parents practiced medicine, and were friends of educator Mary McLeod Bethune. Ms. Bethune arranged for McKenzie's father to attend Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida after the death of his mother. Bethune was an esteemed figure in Lakeland and McKenzie's family attended her lectures. McKenzie describes the emphasis her father placed on education to her and her siblings--each sibling was responsible for helping the next through college. She also talks about her experience at the Washington Park Middle School and High School, her early interest in geography and the social sciences, and playing trombone in the marching band.

African American school superintendents--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.  
Educational consultants--United States--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Floretta Dukes McKenzie, Section A2003\_253\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Floretta Dukes McKenzie's family moved to Washington, D.C. after her father lost his state job for protesting against the Florida school system in 1951. In Washington, McKenzie finished her senior year at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in 1952, and graduated from the District of Columbia Teachers College, in 1956. Unable to find a teaching job in the metro D.C. area, she entered graduate school at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and earned a master's degree in history in 1957. She describes her experience at Howard University and influential professors on campus including Drs. Merze Tate and Rayford Logan. She talks about civil activism on campus and visiting the Howard Theatre. In 1957, McKenzie was hired as a schoolteacher in Baltimore, Maryland. Three years later, she returned to Washington, D.C. as a public school administrator. She describes issues within the D.C. public school system she saw as a teacher and an administrator, as well as the civil rights activity in 1960s Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Floretta Dukes McKenzie, Section A2003\_253\_001\_003, TRT: 0:21:00 ?

Floretta Dukes McKenzie talks about civil rights organizing in Washington, D.C. in the 1960s. She also describes her career as a public school administrator in Montgomery County, Maryland and Washington, D.C. In 1960, McKenzie transitioned from teaching students to supervising principals before she was nominated as the interim superintendent in Washington. Observing her success, then-president of the school board HistoryMaker Marion Barry urged her to officially campaign for the superintendency. McKenzie chose instead to become the assistant superintendent in Montgomery County. She describes running Montgomery County schools and becoming the county's first black woman commissioner of education. She returned to Washington D.C. and left the public

school system altogether in 1988 to start an education consulting firm, The McKenzie Group. McKenzie describes what she learned working in urban school districts, her hopes and concerns for the black community, her legacy, and how she would like to be remembered.