

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elyse White

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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>	White, Elyse, 1908-2008
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elyse White,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 22, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:00:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Travel agent and medical social worker Elyse White (1908 - 2008 ) was a founding member of the African Travel Association (ATA) and was 'enstooled' as an Ashante Queen Mother by the Ghanaian government for her dedication and promotion of the African continent. White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 22, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_071
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Medical social worker and travel agent Elyse White was born on October 1, 1908 in Roanoke, Virginia to Julia Johnson, a school teacher, and William D. Woods, a minister. Graduating from Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. in 1926, White graduated with her B.A. degree from Howard University in 1930. In 1942, White received her post graduate degree from Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

White went on to become a social investigator for the New York City Department of Welfare. In 1950, White began working as a medical social worker at Fordham Hospital in New York. Continuing her education, White received a degree from the New School of Social Research in New York in 1952, and then worked at Lincoln Hospital until 1965. White then took a job with the New York Board of Education as an attendance teacher.

In 1970, White started a third career as a travel agent, and in 1973, she and her sister embarked on a thirty day trip around the world, visiting Europe, Turkey, Israel, India, Japan and Hawaii. Her main love, however, has always been Africa. In 1975, White became a founding member of the African Travel Association (ATA) and began organizing and leading tourist expeditions to Africa. Over the next thirty years, White (who traveled to twenty-five African nations and over eighty countries around the world) made it possible for countless Americans to visit Africa and understand African culture. In 1998, the government of Ghana “enstooled” her as an Ashante Queen Mother for her dedication and promotion of the African continent.

White passed away on May 4, 2008 at the age of 99.

White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 22, 2007.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Elyse White was conducted by Shawn Wilson on February 22, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Travel agent and medical social worker Elyse White (1908 - 2008 ) was a founding member of the African Travel Association (ATA) and was ‘enstooled’ as an Ashante Queen Mother by the Ghanaian government for her dedication and promotion of the African continent.

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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:**

White, Elyse, 1908-2008

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

White, Elyse, 1908-2008--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:

Travel Agent

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Medical Social Worker

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|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 Elyse White, February 22, 2007. 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 Elyse White, Section  
A2007\_071\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:01 2007/02/22

Elyse White was born on October 1, 1908 in Roanoke, Virginia to Julia Johnson Woods and William Woods. White's maternal grandparents were prosperous cotton farmers, and her grandmother had white relatives. One of ten children, White's mother was the first in her family to pursue higher education, and obtained a teaching degree at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. Born in Stewartsville, Virginia, White's father earned a divinity degree from Virginia Theological Seminary and College. He became a pastor, but rarely preached, and made his living by renting shotgun houses. White's parents met and married in Bedford City, Virginia, where her mother taught. Her father passed for white to purchase life insurance. He also infiltrated the Independent Order of Red Men, founding several African American chapters. Seeking better educational opportunities, White's family purchased a home in Washington, D.C., where she attended Lucretia Mott Elementary School. Historian Donald Bogle was White's paternal cousin.

Video Oral History Interview with Elyse White, Section  
A2007\_071\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:27 2007/02/22

Elyse White's father died during the 1920s. White's mother used money from his life insurance policy to purchase a large home, and rented rooms to support her family. White attended Lucretia Mott Elementary School in Washington, D.C., where she was classmates with Isabel Washington Powell. White went on to Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, and graduated in 1926. The American Association of University Women awarded White a scholarship to Howard University; where, in 1928, she pledged Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. White graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in education

in 1930, and obtained a teaching position at Washington, D.C.'s Browne Junior High School. After a year, White left the teaching profession, and moved to New York City's Greenwich Village. Upon the recommendation of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., she worked as a social investigator for the City of New York Department of Welfare. Through her work, White met numerous artists, like Romare Bearden and Palmer Hayden.

Video Oral History Interview with Elyse White, Section  
A2007\_071\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:24 2007/02/22

Elyse White visited New York City's Apollo Theater and Savoy Ballroom in the 1930s. She married Clarence White in 1936, and had two children, Carol White and Clarence White. While her husband was attending Bethune-Cookman College in Florida in the late 1930s, White lived in Harlem's Dunbar Apartments. One of her neighbors was Thurgood Marshall, who later helped her son out of legal trouble while he was a student at Howard University. In 1942, White divorced her husband. She obtained a post-graduate degree from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and became a medical social worker at Fordham Hospital and Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. In 1960, White became a truant officer for the New York City Department of Education. In 1972, after her retirement, White took a month-long tour of ten countries with her sister, Evelyn Woods. Inspired by her travels, White founded the Africa Travel Association in 1975, with the mission of facilitating African Americans' inaugural trips to Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with Elyse White, Section  
A2007\_071\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:15 2007/02/22

Elyse White traveled to more than twenty-five countries in Africa after founding the Africa Travel Association. White recalls the challenges she faced there, including being detained by police in Tunisia after she was mistaken for a spy. In 1998, White was named an Ashante Queen Mother at a ceremony in Ghana. She describes her recent achievements, including her presidency of the Howard University Alumni Club of New York City; her work with the Big Apple Greeter hospitality association; and a citation by Bill Perkins. White reflects upon the history of

integration in the United States, and how segregation has persisted. She also describes the values she learned through Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and recalls being taught by Howard University Professor Percy Lavon Julian. White reflects upon her legacy, and her hopes for the African American community and for Africa. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.