

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gwendolyn E. Boyd

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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>	Boyd, Gwendolyn E.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 25, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:12:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mechanical engineer and civic leader Gwendolyn E. Boyd (1955 - ) was the first African American woman to receive her M.S. degree in mechanical engineering from Yale University. In 2000, she was elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Boyd was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2007, in Fort Washington, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_161
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mechanical engineer and civic leader Gwendolyn Elizabeth Boyd was born on December 27, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama to Dora McClain. Boyd's mother passed away when Boyd was thirteen years old, and her godmother, Emzella Mapson, raised her. Boyd's teachers, at the all-black McDavid Elementary School, nurtured her love of math from a young age. Boyd was one of five black students to integrate Jefferson Davis High School in Montgomery, Alabama. In high school, she helped establish a student interracial council, was a member of the math honor society, and performed choir before graduating as valedictorian in 1973. Boyd attended the historically black Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama on a scholarship, graduating summa cum laude with her B.S. degree in mathematics and minors in music and physics in 1977. She received a fellowship to attend Yale University's School of Engineering in New Haven, Connecticut, becoming the school's first African American woman to receive an M.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1979.

Following her graduation, Boyd worked briefly as an engineer at IBM in Kingston, New York. In 1980, she was offered a position as a submarine navigation systems analyst at the Applied Physics Laboratory at John Hopkins University. Boyd was later appointed to high-level administrative positions, first as the assistant for development programs in 1998 and then as executive assistant to the chief of staff in 2004.

Boyd has been an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., rising through the ranks of the sorority's leadership since joining as a student at Alabama State. In 2000, Boyd was elected for a four-year term as the national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Boyd also serves on the board of directors of Leadership Greater Washington, the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Bennett College and the National Partnership for Community Leadership. She is a member of The Links, Inc., the National Council of Negro Women and Ebenezer A.M.E Church in Fort Washington, Maryland where she serves on the ministerial staff. In 2007, Boyd received her M.Div. degree at Howard University and is an ordained itinerant elder in the

A.M.E. Church. She has also received honorary doctorates from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and Bennett College in North Carolina. In 2010, President Barack Obama nominated Boyd to the board of trustees of the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation.

Gwendolyn E. Boyd was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 25, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd was conducted by Denise Gines on April 25, 2007, in Fort Washington, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Mechanical engineer and civic leader Gwendolyn E. Boyd (1955 - ) was the first African American woman to receive her M.S. degree in mechanical engineering from Yale University. In 2000, she was elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

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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:

Boyd, Gwendolyn E.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Boyd, Gwendolyn E.--Interviews.

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African American engineers--Interviews.

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African American civic leaders--Interviews.

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African American ministers-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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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ScienceMakers

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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 Gwendolyn E. Boyd, April 25, 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 8/9/2011 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, April 25, 2007**

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd, Section A2007\_161\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 2007/04/25

Gwendolyn Boyd begins by talking about her mother, Dora McClain, who was sick throughout Boyd's childhood and died of colon cancer when Boyd was thirteen. Although McClain was a domestic worker, she saved enough money for Boyd to take piano lessons. Boyd eventually began playing for her church, Hillel Chapel, A.M.E. Zion Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Boyd describes her godmother, Emzella Mapson, who raised her after her mother's death. Boyd shares her memory of the day that her mother died, promising that she would get good grades and honor God. Her teachers at the all-black McDavid Elementary School nourished her love of math from a young age. She describes living in Victor Tulane Courts, the housing projects in Montgomery, Alabama. Although there was some criminal activity, she felt protected. One resident, a seamstress, taught her to sew, a skill which Boyd used to earn money and to make her own clothes.

Orphans.

Parents--Death.

African American unmarried mothers.

Public housing--Alabama--Montgomery.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--Alabama--Montgomery.

Mathematics--Study and teaching--United States.

African American churches--Alabama--Montgomery.

African American foster mothers.

Women tailors.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd, Section A2007\_161\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/04/25

Gwendolyn Boyd describes family life at Victor Tulane Courts, project housing where almost every home was headed by a single parent home. She then discusses the struggle of being one of five black students to integrate Jefferson Davis High School. The white teachers tried to discourage her from studying math but her late mother's encouragement strengthened her resolve. Boyd was a member of the school's interracial council, and she remains proud of her role in that reconciliatory project. She graduated from Jefferson Davis as valedictorian in 1973. She discusses her college years at the historically black Alabama State University where the professors nurtured her math skills. Although she was unsure of her career path, she developed an interest in pursuing graduate studies in engineering. Boyd shares the mysterious story of how, without applying, she was offered a fellowship to attend the master's program at Yale University's School of Engineering School.

Single parents--Alabama--Montgomery.

School integration--Alabama--Montgomery.

African Americans--Education--Alabama--Montgomery.

Mathematics--Study and teaching--United States.

Engineering--Study and teaching--United States.

Alabama State University.

African American universities and colleges--Alabama--Montgomery.  
Public housing--Alabama--Montgomery.  
African American women in mathematics.  
Yale University. School of Engineering.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd, Section A2007\_161\_001\_003, TRT:  
0:31:10 2007/04/25

Gwendolyn Boyd continues discussing her years at the Yale University's School of Engineering. She felt isolated as the only woman and only African American. However, she found a strong support network at her church, the Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church in New Haven, Connecticut. After graduation, she worked briefly for IBM before moving to the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University in 1980. Boyd speaks about her work, usually as the sole woman, on nuclear submarines. In 1998, she was promoted to Assistant for Development Programs of the Applied Physics Laboratory. Boyd then discusses her leadership roles in the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., from the time that she was a student at Alabama State University to her election as national president in 2000. Her accomplishments as president included adopting a school in South Africa and endowing a \$1 million scholarship at Howard University.

Yale University. School of Engineering.  
African American women engineers.  
Engineering--Study and teaching--United States.  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.  
African American churches--Connecticut--New Haven.  
Johns Hopkins University. Applied Physics Laboratory.  
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd, Section A2007\_161\_001\_004, TRT:  
0:29:20 2007/04/25

Gwendolyn Boyd continues discussing the initiatives that she oversaw during her presidency of the Delta Sigma Theta, Inc. Sorority. She then shares the importance of church in her life. She was called to have her own ministry and is about to graduate from Howard University's Divinity School with her M.Div. degree. When she first moved to the Washington, D.C. area in 1980, she was a member of the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church but transitioned to Payne Memorial A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, Maryland, where Vashti McKenzie was pastor. Boyd talks about her admiration for McKenzie, who became the first woman to be elected as a bishop in the A.M.E. church. She then discusses her community work and board memberships with organizations including Leadership Greater Washington, the United Way and The Links, Inc. Boyd ends by reflecting on her life's blessings and urging future generations to work hard and to honor God.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.  
Howard University. School of Divinity.  
McKenzie, Vashti M., 1947-.  
African American churches--Maryland--Baltimore.  
African American women and religion.  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.  
African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Video Oral History Interview with Gwendolyn E. Boyd, Section A2007\_161\_001\_005, TRT:

0:13:40 2007/04/25

Gwendolyn Boyd narrates photographs from her personal life and her work in organizations such as Delta Sigma Theta and the United Way. Photograph collections.