

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reginald Weaver

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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>	Weaver, Reginald, 1939-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 2, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:54:07).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Association chief executive Reginald Weaver (1939 - ) is president of the National Education Association. Weaver was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 2, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_224
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reginald Lee Weaver was born on August 13, 1939 in Danville, Illinois to Mary Alice Buchanan and Carl Weaver. Weaver graduated from Danville High School in 1957 and earned his B.A. degree in special education for the physically challenged at Illinois State University in 1961. He received his Masters degree from Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois in 1971.

He served as president of his local in Harvey, Ill., president of the NEA affiliate in Illinois and is now serving his second term as president of the 3.2 million-member National Education Association (NEA) – the nation’s largest professional employee organization.

Weaver also serves as vice president of Education International, a 394-member organization representing nearly 30 million teachers and education workers in 171 countries.

He travels nationally and internationally, working tirelessly as an ambassador for public education and advocating for the basic right of every student to attend a great public school. In 2006, Weaver made a landmark visit to the Lincoln Cathedral in England – home to a very rare copy of the Magna Carta – that was met with widespread acclaim. In recognition of his commitment to democracy and fundamental freedoms, the Cathedral unveiled a stone column in Weaver’s name.

He is the recipient of three honorary doctorates recognizing his “world-class leadership in the efforts to educate children,” the most recent from Lincoln University in the United Kingdom. North Carolina's Shaw University awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Weaver in 2006. He was also conferred with an honorary Doctor of Public Service by South Carolina State University at its 2007 Spring Commencement.

A recognized expert on public education issues, Weaver has testified before Congress on federal education policy and frequently provides a critical voice on public education for national publications, including *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*, along with decision-maker publications, such as *Congressional Quarterly*, *Education Week*, and *Education Daily*. Weaver regularly appears on such news programs as *CNN Headline News*, C-Span’s *Washington Journal*, and *ABC World News Tonight*. He has been invited to discuss pressing education issues on National Public Radio’s *News & Notes with Ed Gordon*, CNN Radio Network, AP Radio Network and others.

His commitment and contributions to public education haven’t gone unnoticed. He has been named one of *Ebony* magazine’s 100 Most Influential Black Americans for his national influence.

Weaver was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 2, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reginald Weaver was conducted by Paul Brock on August 2, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Association chief executive Reginald Weaver (1939 - ) is president of the National Education Association.

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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:

Weaver, Reginald, 1939-

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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National Education Association of the United States.

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## **Occupations:**

Association Chief Executive

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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 Reginald Weaver, August 2, 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 Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:45 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver was born on August 13, 1939 in Danville, Illinois. His father lived in St. Louis, Missouri and worked as a photographer and boxer. As a child, Weaver rode the train down to St. Louis to visit his father who died of cancer when Weaver was in the fourth grade. Weaver's mother, Mary Alice Robinson Buchanan, was from Danville, Illinois and her family traced its roots back to Beckley, West Virginia. Weaver grew up in Danville with his mother and stepfather, Palestine "Eenie" Buchanan, his maternal grandparents, and a large extended family, all of whom took care of him and his three brothers, Karl Weaver and Dewey and Mike Buchanan. His great-grandfather, James Brown, was a crippled man who worked for United Mine Workers' union leader John L. Lewis. Weaver describes his memories of growing up in Danville, where he attended both the integrated Cannon Elementary School and the segregated Jackson School. He recalls white and black teachers from his grade school years.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:27 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver recalls his junior high experience at

Cannon Elementary School in Danville, Illinois where he was the manager of the basketball team. Weaver's friend, Robert Hunter, was also raised in Danville where he played football at Jackson School, an all-black school. At the time of the interview, Hunter owned a barbershop in Chicago, Illinois servicing clients such as HistoryMaker John Hope Franklin and Weaver himself. In 1957, Weaver enrolled at Danville High School, where he excelled in Spanish and joined the wrestling team. Weaver's mother, who also attended Danville High School, was inducted into the school's wall of fame. During her adult life, she worked nights at General Electric and later became a director for Head Start in Illinois. Weaver also talks about his stepfather, who worked at General Motors. Weaver recalls the sounds, sights, and smells of his childhood, his childhood friends, and his religious upbringing

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:18 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver recalls an experience of racial discrimination near the end of his studies at Danville High School in Danville, Illinois. Following in the footsteps of a cousin, he applied to Illinois State Normal University (ISNU), which was a teachers college at the time. Weaver began his studies at ISNU in 1957 with hopes of majoring in Spanish and becoming an interpreter but he ultimately majored in special education with a minor in elementary education. He describes his experience at the predominantly white school and his time in the Blackfriars, a satirical theater group on campus. He won best actor twice for his performances. Weaver also enjoyed success as a wrestler at ISNU citing a 45-7 record in his final two years. As president of the university's NAACP chapter, Weaver had the opportunity to take a car ride with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King in 1961. After graduating from ISNU in 1961, Weaver began working as a fifth grade teacher at Riley Elementary School in Harvey, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:52 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver describes working as a fifth grade teacher at Riley Elementary School in Harvey, Illinois,

where he taught from 1961 to 1981. At Riley, Weaver came to understand that a school community consists of more than just teachers and students. He describes convincing gang members to keep the school a violence-free zone. In 1967, he joined the Harvey Education Association, an educators' union, and quickly became president. From 1981 to 1987, Weaver was the president of the Illinois Education Association. During that period, Illinois' first major collective bargaining bill was signed into law. Weaver reflects on how a good educational system should work. He also reflects on his stint in the Illinois Department of Employment Security from 1987 to 1989, and his recommitment to working in education. In 1989, he returned to teaching and joined the executive committee of the National Education Association. In 1996, he became the NEA's vice president, and in 2002, he became the organization's president.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:03 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver talks about his marriage to Betty Jo Moppin in 1963, with whom he grew up in Danville, Illinois. Before their own two children were born, Weaver and his wife often invited Weaver's students into their home. Weaver contrasts the educational curriculum of the 1970s with the guidelines set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. Initially a supporter, Weaver later found fault with the act, as did the National Education Association (NEA). Weaver describes HistoryMaker Tavis Smiley's role in giving educational issues a national platform. He also talks about school dropout rates, the NEA's minority outreach program, and his duties as the organization's president from 2002 to 2008. On one visit to an underfunded school in Missouri, a child asked why his school could not have classes that were part of the curriculum in other, wealthier schools. The visit motivated Weaver to address funding disparities in public schooling.

Video Oral History Interview with Reginald Weaver, Section  
A2007\_224\_001\_006, TRT: 0:26:42 2007/08/02

Reginald Weaver describes the structure of the National Education Association (NEA). During Weaver's presidency from 2002 to 2008, the NEA consisted of 3.2

million members. As a parent organization, the NEA has affiliates in every state at the state and local levels advocating for equitable education. Weaver describes the history of the NEA as well as its growth and expansion over time. He also talks about the importance of adapting educational methods. Weaver notes the importance of the impending 2008 elections for the appointment of U.S. Supreme Court justices. He concludes by reflecting upon his family, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.