

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lula Ford

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ford, Lula, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lula Ford,
Dates:	February 21, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:11:56).
Abstract:	Education executive, state government appointee, and elementary school principal Lula Ford (1944 -) held teaching, administrative and counseling positions at several of the Chicago Public Schools before becoming the district's assistant superintendent. She also served on the Illinois Commerce Commission. Ford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_022
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Illinois Commerce Commissioner Lula Mae Ford was born on March 11, 1944 to a family of nine in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Ford's father was a World War II veteran that worked most of his life in the Pine Bluff Arsenal, and her mother was a homemaker who also instilled in Ford, as a child, the importance of education. After attending Coleman High School in Pine Bluff, Ford went on to graduate from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in 1965. She then relocated to Chicago, Illinois where she pursued her M.A. degree in urban studies at Northeastern University and later earned her M.A. degree in science, career education and vocational guidance from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

In 1965, Ford began her teaching career at Horner Elementary School. She served in that capacity until 1975 when she became a counselor for at-risk students. Then in 1976, Ford was hired as the mathematics coordinator at McCorkle Elementary School. She resigned from that position in 1979 to become a liaison for parents and the principal selection committee as the ESEA Reading Teacher and Coordinator. Later in 1984, while serving as a math teacher for John Hope Academy, Ford became the coordinator for the Effective Schools Campaign, organizing GED programs and the school's black history programs. Ford went on to become the principal for Beethoven Elementary School and was awarded the principal of excellence award for her performance in 1992, 1993 and 1994. She also provided administrative leadership when she fulfilled the position of assistant superintendent of Chicago Public Schools in 1994. Afterwards, from 1995 until 1996, Ford served as the chief instruction officer, advising teachers and faculty on the best teaching practices.

Ford has received many awards and recognitions for her achievements in the field of education including: the Walter H. Dyett Middle School Women in History Award, the Kathy Osterman Award, the Distinguished Alumni Award from Arkansas, Pine Bluff and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Northeastern Illinois University. Ford was hired as the assistant director of central management services for the State of Illinois from 1999 until

2003. In 2003, Ford was appointed to the Illinois Commerce Commission and was reappointed to the same office in 2008.

Ford is an active member of many civic organizations including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the Lakeshore Chapter (IL) of The Links, Incorporated, and the board of the Trinity Higher Education Corporation.

Ford lives in Illinois and is the proud mother of one adult daughter, Charisse Ford.

Ford was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 21, 2008.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lula Ford was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 21, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education executive, state government appointee, and elementary school principal Lula Ford (1944 -) held teaching, administrative and counseling positions at several of the Chicago Public Schools before becoming the district's assistant superintendent. She also served on the Illinois Commerce Commission.

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:

Ford, Lula, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ford, Lula, 1944- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools

Occupations:

Education Executive

Elementary School Principal

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 Lula Ford, February 21, 2008. 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).

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 Lula Ford, Section A2008_022_001_001, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

Lula Ford was born on March 11, 1944 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas to Nola Jenkins Ford and Chester Ford. Her maternal grandparents, Sallie Borders Jenkins and Grant Jenkins, were freed slaves who became sharecroppers in Rison, Arkansas, where Ford's mother was born and raised. As a young girl, Ford's mother picked cotton on the family's farm, and did not attend school. Ford's father, also a native of Rison, was born in 1919 to Lula Cook Ford and William Ford. After marrying, Ford's parents moved to Pine Bluff, where her father joined the U.S. Army during World War II. He served in Germany, and worked at the Pine Bluff Arsenal. Ford was raised in Pine Bluff, where she attended the New Town School and Coleman Elementary School. She developed her aspirations to become a teacher at the New Town School, under the influence of teacher Sara Howard, whose son was Arkansas Supreme Court Justice George Howard, Jr. Ford also remembers her maternal uncle, Jack Jenkins, who performed at the Riverview Park in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Lula Ford, Section A2008_022_001_002, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Lula Ford grew up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where she learned about the work of local civil rights activist, Wiley A. Branton, Sr. She attended Pine Bluff's Coleman Elementary School; and, during the fifth grade, was selected to appear as a guest on 'The Howdy Doody Show.' Ford went on to enroll at C.P. Coleman High School under Principal C.P. Coleman, who was the school's founder. She joined the cheerleading squad and the drama club; and, although she was a strong student, she was occasionally reprimanded by Principal Coleman for talking in class. During this time, her mother, Nola Jenkins Ford, worked as a domestic, and encouraged Ford to further her education. Ford matriculated at the Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College, where she studied biology under Rufus Caine and Freddie Hartfield. She also listened to the music of Bobby Bland, Jackie Wilson and Aretha Franklin; and marched with civil rights activist Odell Thorns. After graduating in 1965, Ford moved to Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Lula Ford, Section A2008_022_001_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Lula Ford studied at the Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where she saw the Ike and Tina Turner Revue at the Townsend Park Recreation Center. Upon graduating in 1965, Ford was hired to teach at the Henry Horner School in Chicago, Illinois, where many of her students, including actor Mr. T, lived in the Robert Taylor Homes. When the school closed in 1976, Ford joined the faculty of the Helen J. McCorkle School, where she taught future minister and community leader James L. Demus III. She also joined the Chicago Area Alliance of Black School Educators, and met Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. through Operation PUSH. Ford earned master's degrees from the Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies at Northeastern Illinois University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. From 1979 to 1984, she served as a literacy coordinator and teacher at the John Hope Community Academy. She later became a parent development

coordinator for five schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Lula Ford, Section A2008_022_001_004, TRT: 0:28:39 ?

Lula Ford was appointed in 1989 to serve as the principal of Ludwig Van Beethoven Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. She worked with media mogul Oprah Winfrey to reward high achieving students, and received the Principal of Excellence Award for three consecutive years. Her techniques were adopted by Chicago Public Schools CEO Paul Vallas to improve underperforming schools. In 1994, Ford became the assistant superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools under Superintendent Argie K. Johnson. In this role, she managed a budget of \$1 billion. Later, she served as a chief instruction officer and school leadership development officer. In 2000, Ford was appointed by Governor George Ryan to become the assistant director of the Illinois Department of Central Management Services. While there, she was mentored by Illinois Senate President Emil Jones, Jr. In 2003, Ford joined the Illinois Commerce Commission, where she worked with the state legislature to regulate public utilities.

Video Oral History Interview with Lula Ford, Section A2008_022_001_005, TRT: 0:15:30 ?

Lula Ford was appointed to a second term on the Illinois Commerce Commission by Governor Rod Blagojevich. She also served on the boards of organizations like the United Way Worldwide and the Great Books Foundation, and was a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and The Links. Ford worked with the Trinity Higher Education Corporation as a member of the Trinity United Church of Christ, under the leadership of Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. and Reverend Otis Moss III. She supported President Barack Obama's early legislative career, and collaborated with educator Francis Graves Carroll to organize events like the Women For Obama fundraiser. She also served as an elected delegate from the Illinois 1st congressional district. Ford talks about her daughter, Charisse Ford; and describes her hopes for the African American community. She also reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered; and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.