

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William "Sonny" Walker

PERSON

Walker, William "Sonny",
1933-2016

Alternative Names: William "Sonny" Walker;

Life Dates: December 13, 1933-June 15, 2016

Place of Birth: Pine Bluff, Arkansas, USA

Residence: Atlanta, GA

Work: Atlanta, GA

Occupations: Civil Rights Activist; ; Nonprofit Chief Executive

Biographical Note

Civil rights activist, nonprofit chief executive, and management consulting entrepreneur William "Sonny"

Walker was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. He received his B.A. degree from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and went on to teach in Arkansas public schools. In 1956, in the wake of the Brown vs. Board U.S. Supreme Court decisions, Walker helped to prepare the Little Rock Nine to integrate Little Rock Central High School. Walker went on to manage the campaign of T. E. Patterson, the first African American elected to the Arkansas School Board.

In 1965, Walker started the Crusade for Opportunity, one of the first Head Start programs in the U.S. and then began serving as director of the Economic Opportunity Agency of Little Rock and Pulaski County. Throughout this time, Walker worked to promote integration of everything from television news anchors to the local chapter of the United States Junior Chamber. In 1969, Walker began serving as Governor Winthrop Rockefeller's head of the Arkansas State Economic Opportunity Office. He was the first African American to hold such a position in a Southern governor's cabinet.

Walker moved to Atlanta, Georgia in 1972, and began serving as a division director for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Renewal. In 1976, Walker became a member of the Board of Directors for the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Walker eventually became Coretta Scott-King's speech writer and in 1994, he served as interim director of the King Center. Walker went on to found the consulting company the Sonny Walker Group, which specializes in networking, marketing, and employee training.

Walker was a member of the board of trustees of Morris-Brown College, the board of directors of the Butler Street YMCA, the EduPac Action Committee, and the Georgia Partnership for Education Excellence. He was heavily involved with many other community organizations and received numerous awards, including the Community Service Award from the

Atlanta Business League, the Distinguished Community Service Award from the National Urban League, the Outstanding Public Servant in the State of Georgia Award from the Georgia Senate and House of Representatives, and the Lyndon B. Johnson Award from the National Association of Community Action Agencies.

William “Sonny” Walker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 21, 2011.

Walker passed away on June 15, 2016.

Related Entries

Merrill Junior High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.A. degree

Arizona State University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

University of Oklahoma [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

University of Arkansas [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Federal Executive Institute [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Arkansas Public School System [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Teacher

**United States Department of Housing and Urban
Development** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Division Director

Arkansas State Government [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Head of the Economic Opportunity Office

**Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social
Change** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Board of Directors, Interim Director

Sonny Walker Group [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Founder and Consultant

Office of Economic Opportunity [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1972 to 1988]

National Alliance of Business [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1988 to ?]

100 Black Men [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Butler Street YMCA [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Board Member

EduPAC Atlanta [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Co-Chair

**University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff National Alumni
Association** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Chair of Atlanta Chapter

Morris Brown College Board of Trustees [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Vice Chairman

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member