

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruth Brett Quarles

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Quarles, Ruth Brett, 1914-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles,
Dates:	November 11, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:42:11).
Abstract:	Academic administrator Ruth Brett Quarles (1914 - 2007) has been a dean at several academic institutions and served an administrator at Morgan State University for nearly thirty years. Quarles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 11, 2003, in Mitchellville, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_263
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ruth Brett Quarles devoted her life to working with others. Born November 23, 1914 in Winton, North Carolina, as the second of seven children, her mother was a homemaker and her father, an independent farmer. After graduating as valedictorian of her high school class, Quarles attended Shaw University, where she earned her A.B. in 1935 and graduated the top of her class. She earned her M.A. from the Hartford Seminary Foundation the following year, and later returned to school, earning an Ed.D. from Columbia University in 1945.

Quarles began her professional career in 1936 as assistant to the dean of women at Spelman College. In 1938, she became the dean of women at Dillard University, and in 1942, the dean of students at Bennett College. In 1944, she took a position as the associate personnel director at Tuskegee Institute, and in 1949, she became a volunteer with the American Friends Service Committee at the University of Munich, where she worked with displaced German refugees in the aftermath of World War II. Quarles was named the dean of students at Fisk University in 1951, and in 1956, she went to Morgan State University, where she remained until her retirement in 1980. While at Morgan State, she held a variety of posts, including serving as the coordinator of student personnel services and the director of counseling and academic advising.

Quarles' career involvement included being the first African American to sit on the Commission on Education of Women, as well as serving on the national board of directors of the YWCA of America and the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors (NAWDAC). In 1982, NAWDAC sponsored the Ruth Brett Symposium at the University of Maryland to celebrate her long career and dedication to service. Quarles has been listed in Who's Who Among American Women, Who's Who Among Black Americans and Who's Who Among American College and University Administrators. She was married to the late historian and scholar Benjamin A. Quarles, who passed away in 1996.

Quarles passed away on January 16, 2007.

Quarles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 11, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ruth Brett Quarles was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 11, 2003, in Mitchellville, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator Ruth Brett Quarles (1914 - 2007) has been a dean at several academic institutions and served an administrator at Morgan State University for nearly thirty years.

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:

Quarles, Ruth Brett, 1914-2007

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Quarles, Ruth Brett, 1914-2007 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Morgan State University

Occupations:

Academic Administrator

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 Ruth Brett Quarles, November 11, 2003. 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 Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_001, TRT: 0:29:26
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Ruth Brett Quarles was born on November 23, 1914 in Winton, North Carolina.

Her mother, Julia Rosetta Pierce Brett, was born in 1893 and was raised by an aunt after her parents died. Quarles's mother was very loving, despite her childhood hardships, and lived to be almost ninety-six years old. Quarles's father, Arthur Henderson Brett, was born in 1891 and was raised by his grandmother. He was a farmer and government surveyor, who owned a significant amount of land. He lost some of his land during the Great Depression and later, his house burned down. Quarles recalls the diverse community in Hertford County, North Carolina, which included people of English, Native American and African American ancestry. Due to the residents' interracial backgrounds, the county allowed the residents to select their racial identifications one year; many of Quarles's cousins chose to identify as white or Native American. Quarles recalls childhood memories of the water, trees, and corn fields surrounding the places she lived.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_002, TRT: 0:30:25
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Ruth Brett Quarles was an outgoing and assertive child who excelled in school. She was interested in exploring the world and originally hoped to be a missionary. There was little to do while growing up in Winton, North Carolina, although she did have access to newspapers and radio. Most of her early experiences centered on the church, family and school. She attended the Waters Training School for high school, which was later renamed for its principal, Dr. Calvin Scott Brown, who was a strong influence on her life. She entered Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1931 when William Stuart Nelson began his tenure as its first African American president. She recalls Shaw University as a place that had many great teachers and visiting speakers but a very strict campus environment for the students. Quarles worked at President Nelson's home, and was the president of the YWCA, the president of the Alpha Chi Honor Society and the dean of women which she disliked because she had to enforce punitive guidelines.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_003, TRT: 0:30:25
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Ruth Brett Quarles graduated as valedictorian from Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1935. At Shaw, she was mentored by Foster Payne and Hilda Davis. She went to Hartford Theological Seminary for her master's degree in education and then accepted a position as dean of women at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. There, she met W.E.B. Du Bois; his assistant, Ellen Irene Diggs; Benjamin Mays; Sterling Brown and Ann Cook. Although she appreciated the support of President Florence Read, Quarles left Spelman to go to Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana, then Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 1944, Quarles entered Columbia University to complete the graduate work she had been working on incrementally; she earned her Ph.D. in student personnel administration in 1945. Quarles enjoyed her friendship with Minnie Lenore Robbins and the cultural life of New York City, but disliked the de facto segregation of the North. Quarles accepted a position at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40
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Ruth Brett Quarles joined the American Friends Service Committee first going to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia and working with HistoryMaker Richard I. McKinney for a summer before going to Munich, Germany and Helsinki, Finland in 1949 to work with Europeans displaced by World War II. In 1952, Quarles married historian Benjamin A. Quarles who wrote a number of books on

the contributions of African Americans to American history and was a contemporary of HistoryMaker John Hope Franklin. Benjamin Quarles began working at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland in 1953 and Ruth Quarles began working at Morgan State in 1956. There, she coordinated student support services and worked with students such as Kweisi Mfume and HistoryMaker Robert Mack Bell. Quarles believes that Morgan State's open approach to student politics during the 1960s safeguarded it from the turmoil occurring on many other campuses. She also reflects on the continuing challenges of racial integration.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_005, TRT: 0:30:45
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Ruth Brett Quarles joined many organizations throughout her life as a strategy to promote integration. These organizations include the Congress of Racial Equality and the YWCA USA. Some professional organizations, such as the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors, met in segregated spaces, so Quarles worked to change that. She also ensured that organizations, such as the American Personnel and Guidance Association, were more inclusive of African Americans. After her retirement from Morgan State University in 1981, she cared for her husband Benjamin A. Quarles until his death in 1996, which kept her from being as involved. However Quarles believes that she has made important contributions by being a good mother and helping many students realize their potential. She considers what she would have done differently and reflects on how she hopes to be remembered. Quarles concludes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruth Brett Quarles, Section A2003_263_001_006, TRT: 0:11:30
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Ruth Brett Quarles narrates her photographs.