

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mahlon T. Puryear

PERSON

Puryear, Mahlon T.

**Alternative Names:** Mahlon T. Puryear;

**Life Dates:** January 27, 1915-September 26, 2007

**Place of Birth:** Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA

**Residence:** Baltimore, Maryland

**Occupations:** Nonprofit Executive

## Biographical Note

Former deputy director of the National Urban League, Mahlon Puryear was born January 27, 1915, in Winston Salem, North Carolina. One of six children of a contractor, Puryear attended Columbian Heights High School, graduating in 1930 at age fourteen. He also received a diploma from Hampton Institute in 1936 and a B.S. in 1942 before earning a master's from Columbia University Teachers College in 1948. He later studied at Colorado College in Greeley, Colorado.

From 1936 to 1940, he was part owner with his father of Puryear and Sons Builders before teaching at Hampton Institute and Delaware State for three years. From 1943 to 1945 Puryear worked as personnel counselor for Wright Aero Company in New Jersey, when he left to work for the American Red Cross in Maryland and Okinawa. Puryear then went on to serve as a dean at Arkansas A.M. & N College from 1947 until 1951. That year, the National Urban League hired him, and he went on to hold twenty-five different titles including Director of the Southern Field Division. In 1957, Puryear left to direct Tuskegee Institute's Technical Education Program in Indonesia. Returning to the Urban League after a year, Puryear was transferred to New York in 1962. By 1972, he was Director of the Economic Development Department with a staff of seventy-five persons and a budget of more than \$30 million dollars. He opened new affiliates in Charlotte, North Carolina, and in Orange County California in 1982 and 1983, respectively. Primarily focused on education, Puryear worked along side Whitney M. Young and Vernon Jordan to bring opportunities to African American youth.

Retiring after fifty-three years of service, Puryear lives in Baltimore where he enjoys visits from his two daughters and grandchildren.

Puryear was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 15, 2003.

Mr. Puryear passed away on September 26, 2007.

## Related Entries

**Columbian Heights High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Hampton University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Depot Street School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Puryear & Sons** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1936 to 1940]

**Part Owner**

**Hampton Institute** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1998 to 1999]

**Delaware State University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1942 to 1943]

**Wright Aero Company** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 199211 to 199411]

**Personnel Counselor**

**American Red Cross** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2000 to 2001]

**Arkansas AM&N College** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1988 to 1989]

**Dean**

**National Urban League (NUL)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to 2013]

**Tuskegee University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1957 to 1958]

**National Urban League (NUL)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1958 to ?]

**National Urban League (NUL)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1972 to 1983]

**Director of Economic Development**

