

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joseph Dyer

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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>	Dyer, Joseph, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 23, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:34:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast executive and television reporter Joseph Dyer (1934 - 2011 ) was the first African American to work as a television reporter and executive in the Los Angeles community. He played a critical role in covering the 1965 riots, interviewing key community leaders. At the time of his retirement, Dyer had spent more than thirty years with CBS-2. Dyer was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2004, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_047
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The first African American to work as a television reporter and executive in the Los Angeles community, Joseph Dyer was born in Gilbert, Louisiana, on September 24, 1934. The son of sharecroppers, Dyer's father passed away while he was still a child, and by the age of ten, Dyer was picking cotton in the fields with his deaf mother. After graduating from high school in 1953, he attended Xavier University for one year on a football scholarship before transferring to Grambling State University, where he earned his B.A. degree in speech and drama in 1957.

Upon graduating, Dyer moved to Los Angeles, but was called into military service within a month. While in the Air Force, he was stationed at Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, where he became the editor of the base paper and later the host of the base television program. After being honorably discharged in 1961, Dyer returned to Los Angeles, while his wife and daughter remained in Mississippi. He was hired as a technical writer at Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory shortly after his return to Southern California. While working at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Dyer joined Studio West, an artist's enclave where he met individuals such as Greg Morris of *Mission: Impossible*, jazz singer Rita Morris and Cassius Weathersby, who at the time was serving as head of the Labor and Industry Committee for the Beverly Hills NAACP. It was Weathersby who convinced Dyer to apply for a position with CBS-2, Los Angeles' largest television news station at the time. In April of 1965, Dyer was hired on a probationary contract as a writer and news producer.

In August of 1965, riots broke out in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, and Dyer was able to play a critical role. He would call in live phone reports during "The Big News," and he landed interviews with a number of key community leaders at the time, including Maulana Karenga. His career as a reporter featured a number of other interview highlights, including an exclusive interview with Muhammad Ali following the boxer being stripped of his title for refusing to fight in Vietnam.

In 1968, Dyer became the first African American executive in network news when he was named director of community affairs for CBS-2. In this role, he helped to promote diversity within the station and promote the station in the community. This position was not without stress, however, and Dyer became a long-distance runner. He would eventually compete in the Los Angeles Marathon. At the time of his retirement, Dyer had spent more than thirty years with CBS-2.

Dyer has been recognized numerous times for his contributions to the community, and he has also successfully battled prostate cancer. He and his wife, high-school sweetheart Doris Dillon, have four children.

Joseph Dyer was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 23, 2004.

Dyer passed away on 02/24/2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joseph Dyer was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 23, 2004, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast executive and television reporter Joseph Dyer (1934 - 2011 ) was the first African American to work as a television reporter and executive in the Los Angeles community. He played a critical role in covering the 1965 riots, interviewing key community leaders. At the time of his retirement, Dyer had spent more than thirty years with CBS-2.

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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:

Dyer, Joseph, 1934-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Dyer, Joseph, 1934---Interviews

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African American television journalists--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Television Reporter

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Broadcast Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Joseph Dyer, April 23, 2004. 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).

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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 Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Joseph Dyer was born on September 24, 1934 in Gilbert, Louisiana. His mother, Barbara Parker Brooks, came from a family of poor sharecroppers and had more than ten siblings. Brooks was born with a hearing impairment, but was very extroverted and Dyer often had to translate to help facilitate her long conversations. Dyer's father, Joseph Dyer, Sr., worked for the Works Progress Administration and was abusive towards his wife. He died when Dyer was eight years old. As the oldest, Dyer helped support his mother and three sisters. Dyer's family was on welfare, and he worked as a carhop for Capo's restaurant and the Acme Café. When he played with the daughters of the Italian Capo family as a boy, Dyer and the girls were told to move to the backyard to avoid the public eye. Dyer attended Central Memorial High School in Bogalusa, where he starred in school plays and was mentored by his English teacher Jesse Cornelius Crump. Dyer credits his childhood poverty in Louisiana with giving him a drive to succeed.

African American television journalists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Joseph Dyer lived in Bogalusa, Louisiana, a company town based around the Gaylord Container Corporation's paper mill, which emitted a smell that pervaded the whole community. Due to his father's illness and his mother's hearing impairment, Dyer's family was on welfare and picked cotton to supplement their income. When Dyer was nine years old, his father died and he became the man of the house. Dyer was a quiet, solitary child, but took great pleasure in theater and orating and dreamed of becoming an actor. He admired Dr. Felton G. Clark of Southern University, whom he heard speak at Bayou Boys State. In Bogalusa, a group of workers at the paper mill's box factory took their vacation time during the summer so that Dyer could have a summer job, and thereby afford to attend college. Although his mother wanted him to become a school teacher, Dyer attended Xavier University of Louisiana on a football scholarship, and then transferred to Grambling College, where he continued playing football and also studied drama.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Joseph Dyer transferred to Grambling College in Grambling, Louisiana, where he majored in speech and drama. He acted in a production of 'Death of a Salesman' under the direction of Dr. Floyd L. Sandle. Dyer was selected by his professor to introduce Philippa Schuyler at a campus event, but overslept, which instilled in him a lifelong focus on punctuality. Dyer also played college football, and once traveled with his teammates to a HistoryMaker B.B. King show in Covington, Louisiana. Dyer was a loner in college who spent hours studying at the library. He valued the community of attending a historically black college (HBCU), and encouraged his children to spend at least a year at a HBCU. Dyer graduated in 1957, but could not find work in his chosen field. He was drafted into the U.S. Air Force, and was stationed in Grand Forks, North

Dakota, where he was in charge of media production on the base. Dyer became a producer for KCBS-TV in Los Angeles, where he covered the Watts riots in 1965.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Joseph Dyer covered the Watts riots of August 1965 as a reporter for KCBS-TV in Los Angeles, California. Because of the intensity of the riots, Dyer was unable to bring a camera crew, and had to subtly file reports to the station through phone calls. Dyer saw cars being pelted with bricks and bottles, as well as one instance where a white resident of Watts was escorted safely through the riots by his African American neighbors. He observed the relative powerlessness of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, which had very few black firefighters and therefore was not trusted in Watts. Dyer was promoted to manager of community affairs at KCBS-TV in 1968, where he supervised minority affairs and license renewals. He advised KCBS-TV while the station faced protests from Esther Renteria and community leaders for not employing Hispanics in management roles. After the Watts riots, Dyer interviewed HistoryMaker Maulana Karenga during the early stages of the US Organization; they subsequently became friends.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Joseph Dyer, in his career as a reporter and manager at KCBS-TV, interviewed many celebrities, including Muhammad Ali, when Ali announced to the media that he had gone bankrupt after refusing enlistment into the U.S. military during the Vietnam War; and George Wallace, when Wallace campaigned for the presidency in 1968 on the platform of segregation. Dyer wanted to ask Wallace about his campaign expenses, but Wallace steered the conversation back to his controversial positions on race. Dyer did a remembrance for KCBS-TV in front of Second Baptist Church following the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was present at the Ambassador Hotel the night Robert Kennedy was shot. Dyer often dealt with tension when his subjects had not expected to be interviewed by a black reporter. Dyer reflects upon the lessons he learned about the Native American and Hispanic communities while at KCBS-TV. Dyer trained HistoryMaker Warner Saunders, who had been his classmate at Xavier University of Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Joseph Dyer first met Tom Bradley, longtime mayor of Los Angeles, California, through a charitable organization and supported Bradley's unsuccessful races for governor of California in 1982 and 1986. Dyer commends Bradley for catering to L.A.'s diverse constituencies, but feels he sometimes did not go far enough for the black community. The Rodney King beating of 1992 reminded Dyer of southern policing in the 1940s, but he also feels it could have been avoided if King pulled over initially. Dyer organized the CBS receptions for the National Association of Black Journalists for twelve years and mentored young journalists such as Pam Moore and Tony Cox. He comments on his lifelong fascination with the news industry and the lack of progress for African American news anchors, noting specifically that black anchors are often shunted to weekend programs. Dyer reflects upon the O.J. Simpson trial, expresses his hopes for the success of TV One, and his faith in his friend HistoryMaker Johnathan Rodgers.

Video Oral History Interview with Joseph Dyer, Section A2004\_047\_001\_007, TRT: 0:31:13 ?

Joseph Dyer talks about the experience of writing his memoir, 'A Retired Black Television Broadcaster's Lifetime of Memories: From the Cotton Fields to CBS.' He describes his concerns for the African American community and

reflects upon his legacy. Dyer concludes by narrating his photographs.