

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Maxine Duster

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Duster, Maxine, 1939-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster,
Dates:	December 22, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:43:01).
Abstract:	High school teacher Maxine Duster (1939 - 2022) contributed to many aspects of education and children's welfare in Chicago. A former teacher and principal, she also directed the Chicago Urban League's education-focused Smart Program, and managed the Reach Out and Read pediatric literacy program for Illinois' Cook County Hospitals. Duster was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_269
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader and educator Maxine Duster was born on August 23, 1939, in the all black town of Pelham, Texas, which was founded by her newly freed ancestors in 1866. Graduating from Pelham High School in 1956, Duster earned her B.S. degree in education from Texas Southern University in 1961. She would go on to earn masters degrees from Governors State University and National Louis University, both in Illinois.

Duster taught in the Chicago Public School System from 1961 through 1979. From 1982 to 1989, she served as manager of community relations for Michael Reese Hospital. Duster served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Harold Washington Foundation for several years, starting in 1987. Duster was director of the Chicago Urban League's education-focused Smart Program from 1989 to 1991. She also served as vice principal and principal of the Corporate Community School of America from 1991 to 1995. Duster directed the Working in the Schools (WITS) program from 1995 to 1996. From 1997 to 2006, she managed the Reach Out and Read pediatric literacy program for Illinois' Cook County Hospitals.

Well-known for her civic involvement, Duster served on the Leadership Advisory Committee board of the Chicago Art Institute, the Legacy Fund Board of Advisors of the Chicago Community Trust and was a past president of the Chicago Child Care Society. She served for many years as a founding member of the Black Creativity celebration at the Museum of Science and Industry.

Duster was married to Donald Duster. They lived in Chicago and had three grown children: one daughter, Michelle, and two sons, David and Daniel.

Maxine Duster passed away on October 26, 2022 at the age of 83.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Maxine Duster was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 22, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school teacher Maxine Duster (1939 - 2022) contributed to many aspects of education and children's welfare in Chicago. A former teacher and principal, she also directed the Chicago Urban League's education-focused Smart Program, and managed the Reach Out and Read pediatric literacy program for Illinois' Cook County Hospitals.

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:

Duster, Maxine, 1939-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Duster, Maxine, 1939- --Interviews

African American women civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American women teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American social workers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago Public Schools

Occupations:

High School Teacher

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 Maxine Duster, December 22, 2005. 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 Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Maxine Duster was born on August 23, 1939 to Netta Thomas Porter Sims and William Porter, Jr. in Pelham, Texas, a tight-knit, agricultural community founded by African Americans following the Civil War. The Porters, her father's family, were descended from the community's founders. Her maternal ancestors were white and Native American. Duster's mother and father, born in 1913, and 1916, respectively, attended Ash Creek School, Pelham's only school, until the tenth grade when they transferred to schools outside of the community to graduate. Her mother studied at Texas College in Tyler, Texas for one year to become a teacher. In addition to teaching, she was a talented seamstress. Duster remembers her mother as reserved, while her father was more outgoing. After high school, he remained in Pelham, working on his land. Duster describes Professor Zeno Carroll, Ash Creek School's administrator who was well-respected in Pelham and the surrounding towns.

African American women civic leaders--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American women teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American social workers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_002, TRT: 0:30:57 ?

Maxine Duster grew up in Pelham, Texas with her five siblings. She and her family attended Wesley United Methodist Church, one of Pelham's three churches. She remembers how she and her siblings had to walk to school since the buses only carried white children. After passing an oral examination a year early, she attended Pelham School, which comprised elementary and high school. During her time at Pelham School, Professor W. P. Davenport succeeded Professor Zeno Carroll as principal. Duster recalls how she and her classmates engaged in cooperative learning and how she enjoyed studying English. After graduating in 1956, Duster decided to attend Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas, following the suggestion of her maternal uncle, whose daughter Duster roomed with her first year. Duster remembers listening to 'The Lone Ranger' radio program and her paternal great-grandfather's ghost stories. She also talks about her sister's athleticism and the growing popularity of women's sports.

Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_003, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Maxine Duster majored in education at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. In 1959, the university president, Samuel M. Nabrit, selected her to represent the student body at a Houston event featuring John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy. However, she was not chosen to participate in sit-ins, and she speculates about how her approach may have conflicted with the organizers'. She left Texas Southern for a year so that her sister at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University could afford to graduate. In the interim, Duster was a nanny for a wealthy white family until she returned to school. After graduating in 1961, she moved to Chicago where she lived with Eloise Cornelius' family, and substitute taught at Morgan Park High School. She then took elementary education courses and joined the eighth grade faculty at Charles P. Caldwell School. Duster describes her family and volunteer work with Chicago Focus for Women: Black and White. She also recalls Lyndon Johnson's support for civil rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Maxine Duster, as a member of the group Chicago Focus for Women: Black and White, picketed Marshall Field's in Chicago and advocated for more inclusion

of African Americans in cultural institutions. She volunteered at United Way/Crusade of Mercy and the Women's Division. From 1982 to 1989, she served as manager of community relations for Michael Reese Hospital and worked with Walter Burnett, Jr. and HistoryMaker Bobby Rush. Although she wanted to attend Northwestern University, she instead received her graduate degrees in communication science from Governors State University, and in management of human resources from National Louis University. In 1989, upon leaving the Chicago Urban League, where she directed its SMART program, she became assistant principal at Chicago's Corporate Community School. Duster talks about Chicago's Willis Wagons, the challenges she faced in adapting curricula to meet student needs and the death of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She also reflects upon her volunteerism.

Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_005, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Maxine Duster campaigned for Mayor Harold Washington and eventually joined the Harold Washington Foundation in 1987. Between 1989 and 1995, she served as assistant principal, and then principal, of Corporate Community School, a small school on Chicago's West Side supported by corporations. However, she left when the school merged with Chicago Public Schools, as she did not want to return to work in the public school system. Duster then became executive director of Chicago's Working In The School organization before running a pediatric literacy program through the Cook County Health and Hospitals System. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. She also reflects upon her life, legacy and her family's ties to Ida B. Wells, grandmother to her husband, Donald Duster. Duster reflects upon her identity as a former Pelham resident and her educational experience there. She also remembers the circumstances of her father and uncle's murders.

Video Oral History Interview with Maxine Duster, Section A2005_269_001_006, TRT: 0:10:50 ?

Maxine Duster narrates her photographs.