

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harriet Michelle Michel

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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>	Michel, Harriet, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 7, 2005 and March 9, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:38:40).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Foundation executive Harriet Michelle Michel (1942 - ) became the first African American woman to head a major foundation when she joined the New York Foundation. Michel was also appointed director of the Office of Community Youth Empowerment Programs/CETA for the United States Department of Labor, and served as president and CEO of the National Minority Suppliers Development Council. Michel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 7, 2005 and March 9, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_059
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Harriet Michel was born Harriet Richardson in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on July 5, 1942, to John Robert and Vida Harmony Richardson. Attending A. Leo Weil School and McKinley Elementary School, Michel also studied in Norway as an American Field Service exchange student before graduating from Coraopolis High School in 1960. In 1965, Michel earned her B.A. degree in sociology and criminology from Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

From 1965 to 1970, Michel was a program officer for the National Scholarship Service (NSSFNS). Joining the New York Foundation as its executive director in 1970, Michel became the first African American woman to head a major foundation. During President Jimmy Carter's administration, Michel served as director of the Department of Labor's Office of Community Youth Empowerment Programs/CETA. She established the Women Against Crime Foundation at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 1982 and served as president of the New York Urban League from 1983 to 1988. A resident fellow at Harvard University's Institute of Politics in 1988, Michel later joined the National Minority Suppliers Development Council (NMSDC), eventually becoming its president and chief executive officer. At NMSDC, Michel encouraged African American businesses to compete with larger white businesses.

For her work, Michel has received many awards including the 2004 Enterprising Woman of the Year Award; the Executive Leadership Council's Achievement Award; and the Legacy Award from the Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency. A member of three United States Agency for International Development missions to South Africa, Michel also served on the United States-Haiti Business Development Committee. She is a founding member of the Association of Black Foundation Executives.

# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harriet Michelle Michel was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 7, 2005 and March 9, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Foundation executive Harriet Michelle Michel (1942 - ) became the first African American woman to head a major foundation when she joined the New York Foundation. Michel was also appointed director of the Office of Community Youth Empowerment Programs/CETA for the United States Department of Labor, and served as president and CEO of the National Minority Suppliers Development Council.

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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:

Michel, Harriet, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Michel, Harriet, 1942---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:

Association Chief Executive

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 Harriet Michelle Michel, March 7, 2005 and March 9, 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).

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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 Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel was born July 5, 1942 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her maternal grandparents were from West Elkton, Ohio. Her maternal grandfather was very strict and raised their ten children on his own. Her mother, Vida Fish

Richardson, was raised in Elizabeth, New Jersey where she completed high school. Michel's paternal great-grandparents were from Rural Retreat, Virginia where her great-grandmother was the community's medicine woman. A school teacher, Michel's paternal grandmother met Michel's grandfather in Virginia, although the couple divorced when Michel's father was twelve years old. Michel's father, John Richardson, Jr., grew up with his father in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania where he graduated from high school. In Pittsburgh, he sang in a band that performed at the New Granada Theater. When he began working for Jones and Laughlin Steel, the family moved from Pittsburgh to Coraopolis. Michel and her older brother enjoyed attending their parents' parties.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel's father enjoyed playing pranks on family and friends and listening to big band music. As a child, he and his siblings performed as part of the Candy Kids ensemble on KDKA radio station in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Michel had relatives that passed for white and their disavowal angered her. Her parents taught her not to feel limited by her race or gender. Although they were not especially religious, her family attended St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church where she sang in the choir. She attended A. Leo Weil Elementary School in Pittsburgh before her family moved to Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. In Coraopolis, she attended McKinley Elementary School and Coraopolis Junior High School before graduating from Coraopolis High School. In her senior year, Michel's English teacher brought her to see Marian Anderson at Syria Mosque in Pittsburgh. As part of a student exchange program for the American Field Service, Michel visited Norway for nine months and was the only black person in a small Norwegian town.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel lived in a small town in Norway where she was the only black person who many townspeople ever encountered. Her hosts were curious to learn about racism in America as they listened to radio broadcasts about the Little Rock Nine. Michel's discussions with them helped foster her own ideas about race. When she returned to Coraopolis High School, she befriended a Swedish student as she found herself more drawn to European sensibilities. Juniata College, a Church of the Brethren school in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania recruited Michel to increase diversity. Michel regretted her decision to attend Juniata and stayed only because of her full scholarship. She sang in the school choir and later joined a jazz group at nearby Pennsylvania State University in State College. In 1965, she met Galway Kinnell, Juniata College's poet-in-residence, and they participated in demonstrations in Montgomery, Alabama. Charles Moore photographed Michel and Kinnell when they were attacked by Alabama State troopers.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel's participation in a civil rights demonstration was censured by Juniata College's administration. Nevertheless, Michel graduated with her bachelor's degree in sociology in 1965. She then worked for the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, a counseling organization for black students. In the early 1970s, she became a program associate for New York Foundation (NYF). She left briefly to work on the John Lindsay mayoral administration's drug policies. After returning to NYF as executive director, she co-founded the Association of Black Foundation

Executives with HistoryMaker James Joseph. In 1977, Michel was appointed to the U.S. Department of Labor where she worked with HistoryMaker Ernest Green to direct a youth program. She was then reassigned to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's fair housing program. Michel remembers assassinations of civil rights leaders in the 1960s and changes in government funding during the Reagan administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel worked at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City before being selected as the first female president of the New York Urban League in 1983. Michel also participated in TransAfrica and led demonstrations against the South African Embassy. Her activist participation, and a board member's animosity, led to Michel's firing from the Urban League in 1988. She then received a fellowship to attend the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts where she taught a course that featured presentations by HistoryMakers Roger Wilkins and Chuck Stone. In 1988, she was appointed president of the National Minority Supplier Development Council, an organization that certifies minority suppliers nationwide and pairs them with corporate members. Michel considers the impact, successes and challenges of supplier diversity programs for minority businesses, entrepreneurs and Corporate America.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_001\_006, TRT: 0:12:31 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel narrates her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_002\_007, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel, as head of the National Minority Suppliers Development Council (NMSDC), revised the criteria for minority controlled businesses to retain their minority status. This decision was criticized by HistoryMakers Earl G. Graves, Sr. and Reverend Al Sharpton and other African American leaders. HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, however, supported NMSDC's decision. Michel explains the economic challenges of keeping black-owned businesses strictly independent. She cites Robert L. Johnson's sale of BET to Viacom as an example of a larger company's resources enabling a black business to offer more opportunities to the black community. She differentiates between minority-owned and minority-controlled businesses. Michel also considers the economic and social effects of offshore industries, particularly for minority business enterprises (MBEs). Michel reflects upon her worldview, her role as a liaison between corporations and MBEs and her identity as an African American female executive.

Video Oral History Interview with Harriet Michelle Michel, Section A2005\_059\_002\_008, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Harriet Michelle Michel was working at National Minority Suppliers Development Council in New York City during the September 11, 2000 attacks on the World Trade Center. As a result, Michel's organization considered canceling its annual conference. However, they decided to continue with the conference as planned; Michel remembers the conference was well-attended and successful. Michel describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She sees a need for strengthening African American identity and community, especially among the younger generation, and notes the opportunities for minority suppliers in the business world. Michel shares her future plans and goals, including her economic development aspirations for Haiti

where she and her husband, Yves Michel, own a home. She concludes the tape by reflecting upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered.