

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Merline Pitre

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Pitre, Merline, 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre,
Dates:	November 28, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:43:24).
Abstract:	Historian and educator Merline Pitre (1943 -) worked as a history professor and administrator at Texas Southern University since 1976, and became the Texas State Historical Association's first African American president in 2011. Pitre was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 28, 2016, in Houston, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_116
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Historian and educator Merline Pitre was born on April 10, 1943 in Opelousas, Louisiana to Robert and Florence Pitre. Pitre graduated from Plaisance School in Plaisance, Louisiana; and went on to earn her B.S. degree in French from Southern University, and her M.A. degree in French from Atlanta University. She also earned her second M.A. degree and Ph.D. degree in history from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1972 and 1976, respectively.

In 1967, Pitre taught French at St. Augustine College in Raleigh, North Carolina before returning to her hometown in 1971 to teach French at Plaisance High School. After receiving her Ph.D. degree, Pitre was hired as an assistant professor of history at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. In 1980, she served as group leader for the Texas Consortium of Black Colleges and Universities trip to Haiti, and then as group leader in 1981 for the Texas Southern University Fulbright Fellows Trip to Haiti and Santo Domingo. From 1983 to 1985, Pitre served as the associate dean for the College of Liberal Arts & Behavioral Sciences at Texas Southern University, later serving as dean of the college from 1990 to 1994 and again from 2000 to 2008.

Pitre released her first book in 1985, *Through Many Dangers, Toils and Snares: The Black Leadership of Texas, 1868 to 1898*. Pitre's book *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957*, was published in 1999. She also served as co-editor, with Bruce Glasrud, of the 2008 book *Black Women in Texas History*, and the 2013 book *Southern Black Women in the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. During her career at Texas Southern University, Pitre served on the boards of several organizations. She was on the 1993 Editorial Advisory Committee of *The Griot Journal* for the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc., and served as president of SCAASI from 2007 to 2008. She also served on the nominating board for the Organization of American Historians, and the advisory committee of the *OA Magazine of History*. In 2011, she became the first African American president of the Texas State Historical Association. During that time, she also became the editor of the African American Handbook of Texas. She authored the book *Born to Serve: A History of Texas*

Southern University, published in 2018.

Pitre received numerous awards for her work over the years, including the Liz Carpenter Award from the Texas State Historical Association in 2008 and 2014. She was also named the 1988 Outstanding Black Texan by the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, and awarded the Black Caucus Award in 1989. She received the Lorraine Williams Leadership Award from the Association of Black Women Historians in 2014, and Texas Southern University named her the 1987 Scholar of the Year, in addition to awarding her the 2014 President Achievement Award. She received special recognition for her research from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

Merline Pitre was interviewed by *The Historymakers* on November 28, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Merline Pitre was conducted by Denise Gines on November 28, 2016, in Houston, Texas, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Historian and educator Merline Pitre (1943 -) worked as a history professor and administrator at Texas Southern University since 1976, and became the Texas State Historical Association's first African American president in 2011.

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:

Pitre, Merline, 1943-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Pitre, Merline, 1943---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

History Professor

Educator

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 Merline Pitre, November 28, 2016. 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 Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_001, TRT: 1:29:45 ?

Merline Pitre was born on April 10, 1943 in Plaisance, Louisiana to Florence White Pitre and Robert Pitre. Her maternal grandmother, Rosella Sam White, grew up in the rural community of Plaisance, where her family owned property. Pitre's maternal grandfather, Vallery White, helped build the Plaisance School in Opelousas, Louisiana, which was financed in part by the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Both of Pitre's parents were raised in Plaisance, where they worked as sharecroppers. Her father had five children by his first wife, who died at a young age. He then married Pitre's mother, with whom he had three children, including Pitre's sister and brother, Sandra Pitre Taylor and Gregory Pitre. Pitre began her education at the Plaisance School, where she studied African American history under Josie Hammond Vann. From the age of seven years old, Pitre missed part of the school year to work on her family's farm. She also attended the Mohorn Baptist Church in Plaisance, where her mother taught Sunday school.

Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_002, TRT: 2:28:21 ?

Merline Pitre was educated through eighth grade at the Plaisance School in Opelousas, Louisiana. In 1948, the school became Plaisance High School, where Pitre graduated as valedictorian in 1962. She received a National Defense Student Loan to attend Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she majored in French with a minor in social studies. During this time, the university president, Felton Grandison Clark, was compelled by the State of Louisiana to expel eighteen student demonstrators. Pitre went on to earn a master's degree in French from Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. While there, she participated in the Institute of the Black World. Upon graduating in 1967, she was hired to teach French at Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Then, Pitre completed a Ph.D. degree in history at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Under her advisor Lawrence D. Reddick, she wrote her dissertation on the loyalty of Frederick Douglass to the Republican Party.

Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_003, TRT: 3:29:21 ?

Merline Pitre joined the faculty of the history department at Texas Southern University (TSU) in Houston, Texas in 1976. Around this time, she wrote her first book, 'Through Many Dangers, Toils and Snares: Black Leadership in Texas, 1868-1898,' in response to the absence of scholarship on black Texan politicians during Reconstruction. In addition to redistricting, she found that many black legislators advocated for the founding of schools in Texas. In 1980, Pitre led a trip to Haiti and the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Texas Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Her article, 'Frederick Douglass and the Annexation of Santo Domingo,' was then published in *The Journal of the Negro History*. In 1985, Pitre wrote 'In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957,' which studied the activism of Lulu B. White. Pitre went on to serve as the college dean at TSU, where she developed the women's studies program and organized a teacher workshop on the history of Jim Crow.

Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_004, TRT: 4:28:35 ?

Merline Pitre was a member of the history department faculty of Texas Southern

University in Houston, Texas for over thirty-five years. From 1990 to 1994, she served as dean of the university's College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences. Around this time, she and Bruce A. Glasrud edited the essay collection 'Black Women in Texas History,' which won a Liz Carpenter Award. Pitre was also active in organizations like the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians, where she served as president in 2007. In 2011, she helped develop the digital Handbook of African American Texas for the Texas State Historical Association. At this point in the interview, Pitre talks about the significance of the U.S. Supreme Court decision of Sweatt v. Painter in 1950 for subsequent educational equality cases, like Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In 2013, Pitre and Bruce A. Glasrud co-edited the collection 'Southern Black Women in the Modern Civil Rights Movement.'

Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_005, TRT: 5:27:47 ?

Merline Pitre was the dean of the Texas Southern University (TSU) College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences in Houston, Texas from 1990 to 1994. During this time, her publications included 'Black Houstonians and the Separate but Equal Doctrine' and 'Different Strokes for Different Folks: African Americans and Source Material.' At TSU, she hosted lectures and conferences on topics like The Fourteenth Amendment and Black Quest for Equality, and Salvaging the Self: Black Southerners' Response to Jim Crow. She received numerous awards for her scholarship, including the Lorraine A. Williams Leadership Award from the Association of Black Women Historians. She also served on the peer review board of the Journal of American History. Pitre's personal memoir was included in Deborah Gray White's edited volume, 'Telling Histories: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower.' At this point in the interview, she talks about the history of Texas Southern University, which was the topic of her forthcoming book.

Video Oral History Interview with Merline Pitre, Section A2016_116_001_006, TRT: 6:19:35 ?

Merline Pitre grew up in the rural black community of Plaisance, Louisiana. Like Pitre, many of the children from the neighborhood grew up to become educators, including biology professor O'Neil Ray Collins. At the time of the interview, Pitre intended to compile a history of African American life in St. Landry Parish, Louisiana. She also shares her account of the police riot that occurred on the campus of Texas Southern University in 1967, which resulted in the arrest of hundreds of black students. Pitre reflects upon her life and legacy, as well as the importance of The HistoryMakers project. She shares her advice to students, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.