

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Steen Miles

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Miles, Steen, 1946-   |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | February 17, 2014 and February 21, 2014   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2014  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:36:16).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Journalist The Honorable Steen Miles (1946 - 2017 ) , a former Georgia State Senator, was a managing editor and reporter/anchor at WXIA-TV, and served as the Georgia State Broadcast Editor for United Press International. She was the author of Teeny: Newslady In Training. Miles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 17, 2014 and February 21, 2014, in Decatur, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2014_018   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Politician and journalist Steen Miles was born on August 20, 1946 in South Bend, Indiana to Rose and Austin Davis, a pastor. Miles graduated from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where she studied business education and English. She also attended Indiana University at South Bend, the University of Cincinnati, Georgia State University, and received certification from the University of South Carolina's Daniel School of Management.

Miles began her journalism career in 1971, as a reporter/anchor for WNDU-TV in South Bend, Indiana. She then worked for WCKY Radio in Cincinnati, NBC's WMAQ Radio in Chicago, and as news director for WBMX and WVON-WGCI in Chicago. From 1980 to 1984, she was State Broadcast Editor for United Press International in Atlanta, Georgia before joining WXIA-TV, the Atlanta NBC affiliate, where she served as assignment editor, managing editor and reporter-anchor from 1984 to 1999. In 2001, Miles was hired as chief media relations officer for Atlanta's Metropolitan Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), and served as the agency's primary spokesperson. In 2003, she hosted the talk show "Faith in the City Forum," a discussion of current events and public policy from diverse faith perspectives. In 2005, Miles was elected to the Georgia State Senate serving District 43. While in the Senate, she wrote and/or co-sponsored seventy-one pieces of legislation and resolutions. Miles ran for Lieutenant Governor of Georgia in 2006, and in 2008, became a contributing columnist to *The Champion Newspaper*. She is a candidate in the 2014 elections for U.S. Senate.

During her esteemed career, Miles has been recognized with over 275 awards and honors from businesses, government, civic organizations, Greek organizations, churches, schools and universities. She has won three Emmy Awards and received four Emmy nominations. In 2012, Miles was awarded the 1st Place Editorial Writing Award by the Georgia Press Association, and in 2013, she was honored by 4th District Congressman Hank Johnson with an Outstanding Citizen Citation. In 1996, Miles was awarded the coveted Pioneer Journalist of the Year by the Atlanta Association of Black Journalists. She was an SCLC Women Mentor with the late Evelyn

Lowery, and was featured in Who's Who in Black Atlanta. Miles was invited twice to the White House as part of a select group of national journalists, and invited by the Speaker of the House to attend the ceremony where Nelson Mandela received the Congressional Gold Medal in 1998. In 2006, she was honored with the Keys to the City of South Bend, Indiana, her hometown.

Miles was a 2002 graduate of Leadership DeKalb and served on its board. She was also a 2005 graduate of the Regional Leadership Institute. In addition, Miles was an associate minister at the Greenforest Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia. Her childhood memoir, *Teenie: Newslady in Training*, was published in 2007.

Miles lived in Decatur, and has two adult children, Kellie and Heather, and two grandchildren, William and Kellea.

Steen Miles was interviewed by *The History Makers* on February 17, 2014.

Miles passed away on March 29, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Steen Miles was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 17, 2014 and February 21, 2014, in Decatur, Georgia, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Journalist The Honorable Steen Miles (1946 - 2017), a former Georgia State Senator, was a managing editor and reporter/anchor at WXIA-TV, and served as the Georgia State Broadcast Editor for United Press International. She was the author of *Teenie: Newslady In Training*.

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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:

Miles, Steen, 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Miles, Steen, 1946---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:

Journalist

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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 The Honorable Steen Miles, February 17, 2014 and February 21, 2014. 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 The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_001\_001,  
TRT: 1:29:16 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles was born on August 20, 1946 in South Bend, Indiana. Her mother, Rose Edna Wheeler Davis, was born on February 3, 1926 in Collins, Mississippi. Her maternal great-grandmother, Lucy Draughn, had been known locally as a medicine woman. She was mixed-raced of Choctaw and white ancestry. Draughn had three daughters, two with white men and the third, Miles' grandmother Christine Magee, with a black man. Miles' grandmother married Darncey Wheeler, a black man who Miles describes as a seer. She describes Wheeler, as well as a time her great-grandmother healed a serious wound she had sustained as a child. Miles' father, Austin Davis, was born in 1921 in Bassfield, Mississippi. Miles describes her mixed-race family dynamic and remembers visits from white cousins in Mississippi. Her maternal family members were also farmers in Collins, Mississippi and owned land that had been passed down from Draughn's father. She talks about her childhood visits to the area, her parents, and their deaths.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_001\_002,  
TRT: 2:28:11 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles' paternal family descended from Bassfield, Mississippi, near Collins, Mississippi, the hometown of her mother, Rose Davis. Miles' paternal great-grandparents were enslaved and according to records, her great-grandmother, Penny Reynolds, had developed a reputation for running away. Miles recalls stories and lessons from her paternal grandfather, Albert Davis, who had been enslaved until he was ten years old. She recalls stories from his early life, life under segregation, and talks about variation in the family's skin tones. Miles' father, Austin Davis, was born in 1921 in Bassfield. He attended seminary at Bethel College in Mishawaka, Indiana after serving in the U.S. Military during World War II. He was Baptist and met Miles' mother during a revival near their hometowns in Mississippi. The couple relocated to South Bend, Indiana where Davis got a job with Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company. Miles describes her parents' personalities and lists her siblings.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_001\_003,  
TRT: 3:27:58 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles lists her siblings, with whom she grew up in South Bend, Indiana. Her mother, Rose Davis, worked as a part-time maid and her father, Austin Davis, became a minister. Miles describes her childhood in South Bend, where she attended Franklin Elementary and South Bend Central High. She recalls several incidents where she was discriminated against due to her race or ignored by teachers. She also describes her fourth grade teacher, who encouraged her to write. As a child, Miles wanted a nose job, as she had been made fun of for her features. She talks about euro centric beauty standards and her latent appreciation for her features, as well as her appreciation for her family vacations to Mississippi despite the sometimes-present danger. Miles recalls being discriminated against by police while the family waited for a car repair on

their way down South. She also recalls Emmett Till's murder in 1955 and her parents' reticence to speak about issues of race.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_001\_004,  
TRT: 4:30:39 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles grew up with actor Mike Warren, who was elected the first black student president of South Bend Central High School. As a student at South Bend High School, Miles wrote for the paper, was on yearbook staff, and participated in theater and choir. She compares the school's segregation to the segregation her daughters experienced in DeKalb County, Georgia high schools. Miles graduated from South Bend in 1964, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. She describes how activity surrounding the movement affected her everyday life, including the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After high school, she enrolled at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where she studied business education and minored in English. In 1966, she married and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where she witnessed riots following King's death. Miles returned to South Bend and worked as a part-time DJ for WNDU and as community services director for the Urban League.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_001\_005,  
TRT: 5:30:25 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles worked as community service director for the National Urban League in South Bend, Indiana in the early 1970s before she was hired as a part-time disc jockey at WNDU AM and FM. Her show was titled 'Steen King the Soul Queen.' She was later hired as a news reporter for 'Coffee Talk,' a WNDU-TV public affairs television show, by Harry Kevorkian, the station's news director. Kevorkian received criticism for hiring Miles because she did not have a journalism degree and also because she was an African American woman. Miles describes her adjustment to being the sole black woman in the newsroom. In 1974, Miles was hired as a news reporter at WMAQ Radio, an NBC owned and operated station in Chicago, Illinois. She talks about news items she covered there, abrupt firings at the station and the working relationship between press and politicians. Miles also lists her mentors, who include her parents, Rose and Austin Davis, and Harry Kevorkian.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_001,  
TRT: 1:28:45 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles details her family ancestry. She was born on August 20, 1946 in South Bend, Indiana to Rose Wheeler Davis and Austin Davis. Miles' maternal family owned and farmed land in Collins, Mississippi. Her maternal great-grandmother, Lucy Draughn, had been known locally as a medicine woman. She was mixed-raced of Choctaw and white ancestry. Draughn had three daughters, two with white men and the third, Miles' grandmother Christine, with a black man. Miles' grandmother married Darney Wheeler, a black man who Miles describes as a seer. She describes Wheeler, as well as a time her great-grandmother healed a serious wound she had sustained as a child. Miles' father was from Bassfield, Mississippi, near Collins. Miles' paternal grandfather had been born ten years after emancipation and she recalls his memories of living in the segregated South. She also talks about her paternal great-grandmother, Penny Reynolds, an enslaved woman who had been known for making several attempts to run away.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_002,  
TRT: 2:30:27 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles considers her likeness to her parents and lists and

describes her eight siblings. Miles grew up in South Bend, Indiana in a neighborhood on its south east side that had been nicknamed “the twilight zone” and “no-man’s land” because of its tiny population. Her parents' home was located down the street from the University of Notre Dame. Her family was one of a few African American families on the town's south east side. Miles attended Franklin Elementary School on Sample Street in South Bend, Indiana where she was the only black student in most classes. She recalls a traumatic experience in the second grade when she had been ignored by a teacher, and remembers being encouraged to write by another. After Franklin, she attended James Whitcomb Riley Junior High School also in South Bend. Miles recalls attempting to sneak and wear lipstick without her father's knowledge and his eventual relenting.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_003, TRT: 3:28:26 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles attended Central High School, an integrated high school in South Bend, Indiana. She describes subtle discrimination there and recalls fighting frequently as a high school student. Despite this, she had been involved in many extracurricular activities, including drama, choir, Spanish club, and the American Field Service. She graduated in 1954—actor and basketball player Mike Warren had been elected the school's first black senior class president that same year. She talks about Warren as well as Jimmy King, her nephew who was a rising basketball star at the time of the interview. Miles dreamed of becoming a UN ambassador but did not receive adequate college counseling. She enrolled at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana and settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1969, Miles was hired at WNDU in South Bend as a DJ and later became a newscaster and talk show host. She describes her time there and her mentor, Harry Kevorkian. In 1972, she was recruited by WCKY Radio in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_004, TRT: 4:29:14 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles worked as a newscaster for WCKY radio in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1972. She remembers notable, local figures in broadcasting including Al Schottelkotte and HistoryMaker Jocelyn Dorsey. Miles returned to her hometown in South Bend, Indiana and worked at WNDU after learning her mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer. She was recruited by WMAQ in Chicago, Illinois where she did a series of investigative reports called 'Milk Bilk,' reporting on sales of stale milk in Illinois. She also covered mob activity, amongst other news. She describes abrupt firings at the station and recalls leaving in 1978 just after her mother's death. In 1979, Miles was among a small cadre of journalists invited to the White House by President Jimmy Carter. Miles moved to Atlanta, Georgia in 1981, where she was appointed broadcast editor for United Press International (UPI). She talks about UPI and also shares anecdotes of her years in Chicago radio covering the city's politics and meeting Muhammad Ali.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_005, TRT: 5:28:38 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles moved to Atlanta, Georgia in the 1980s, at a time when African Americans were gaining political power in the city. She shares a time that an editor’s negative attitude toward her changed after he saw Miles’ work as coordinator of the United Press International (UPI) Broadcast Awards. Miles was fired from UPI in 1983 and hired at WXIA-TV in 1984. She was quickly promoted to managing editor, but later demoted to reporter. She recalls a dream she had about the removal of the news director whose appointment

caused her demotion. Miles talks about her successes as a reporter and lists awards she received for her work, including two Emmys. Miles recalls stories she covered for her station, including interviewing Dent “Wildman” Myers, who owned a roadside store filled with racist memorabilia in Kennesaw, Georgia. She recalls meeting him and visiting him again fifteen years later. Miles also recalls Nelson Mandela being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1998.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_006,  
TRT: 6:31:16 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles left WXIA-TV in Atlanta, Georgia in 1999 and entered politics. That same year, she ran for CEO of DeKalb County, Georgia and lost. She worked for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority for several years before running for state senator; she won the senate seat by a landslide in 2004. Miles shares her accomplishments as state senator. She held the position for one term; and, in 2006, she ran for lieutenant governor of Georgia. Miles lost, and went on to write a weekly column, serve as an International Ambassador for Peace, and write a memoir, ‘Teenie.’ At the time of the interview, she had been writing a second memoir and running for U.S. Senate—the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful. She describes the race and her reasons for running. Miles also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She talks about her daughters and reflects upon her life, legacy, and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Steen Miles, Section A2014\_018\_002\_007,  
TRT: 7:13:01 ?

The Honorable Steen Miles narrates her photographs.