

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Barbara Samuels

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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>	Samuels, Barbara, 1937-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Samuels,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 17, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:13:49).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Business consultant and retail buyer Barbara Samuels (1937 - ) has served as a national buyer for Sears, and founded THE LION'S SHARE, to offer profit-oriented advice for the fashion industry. Samuels was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_301
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Founder and president of THE LION'S SHARE, INC. Barbara Samuels was born August 15, 1937, in Gary, Indiana. The daughter of Blanche and Dr. John Wilson, Samuels grew up in Chicago where she attended Burke Elementary School and graduated in 1955 from Lucy Flower Vocational High School. She then attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Chicago State University.

Her career began at Sears Roebuck and Company in 1963 as a copywriter for the Sears & Roebuck Catalog. She was the first African American to hold that position. Samuels worked as part of a design team at Sears & Roebuck that made

household accessories including lighting fixtures, dinnerware and tabletop items. Samuels was then promoted to buyer of handbags and later to national buyer of casual footwear. In 1998, she was named global "Buyer of the Year," winning out over 300 other contestants. She was also one of the first African Americans to visit many of the manufacturing facilities abroad.

After an early retirement, Samuels launched THE LION'S SHARE in 1994. The firm offers practical, profit oriented advice for fledgling designers, merchants and small companies in the fashion industry. Samuels organizes fashion shows for major organizations and charities such as the Jesse Owens Foundation, the Chicago Urban League, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. As a media personality, she has participated in fashion segments on Channel 32 Fox TV, WVON Radio, and the Bertrice Berry Show. Samuels was wardrobe and set design consultant for public television's *America's Family Kitchen* with VertaMae Grosvenor. She has also written a fashion column for N'DIGO. Samuels serves as board member or officer of several fashion-related entities, including Fashion Group International, the Apparel Industry Board, Inc. of Illinois, GenArt, The Color of Fashion, the Leaguers of the Chicago Urban League and the Costume Committee of the Chicago Historical Society.

Samuels has two sons, Michael and Gregory. She resides on Chicago's North Side.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Barbara Samuels was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Business consultant and retail buyer Barbara Samuels (1937 - ) has served as a national buyer for Sears, and founded THE LION'S SHARE, to offer profit-oriented advice for the fashion industry.

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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:**

Samuels, Barbara, 1937-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Samuels, Barbara, 1937---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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Sears, Roebuck and Company.

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## **Occupations:**

Business Consultant

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Retail Buyer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

StyleMakers

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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 Barbara Samuels, December 17, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Barbara Samuels, Section  
A2003\_301\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:09 2003/12/17

Barbara Samuels was born on August 15, 1937 in Chicago, Illinois. Her mother, Blanche Daniel, was born in 1917 in Monmouth, Illinois, the daughter of a gentleman farmer. Daniel studied at the University of Illinois in Champaign, before moving to Chicago to work at the Regal Theater. Samuels's father, John Wilson, was born in 1917 in Chicago. Wilson separated from Samuels's mother a few years after Samuels was born. Samuels grew up with her mother and two siblings in Chicago's Washington Park neighborhood where she was badly injured when she fell off of the third-floor porch of the family apartment. Until she turned thirteen, Samuels traveled every summer to work on her step-grandfather's farm in Mississippi. In Chicago, she attended Burke Elementary School and Lucy Flower Vocational High School. At Lucy Flower, she faced intense racism at school for the first time in her life. As a youth, Samuels frequented the Regal Theater and Chicago Theater, meeting figures like James Brown, Al Green, and Leslie Uggams.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Samuels, Section  
A2003\_301\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/12/17

Barbara Samuels met famous actors like Zachary Scott and Lurlean Hunter as a teenager. She also endured racial prejudice as a student at Lucy Flower Vocational High School in Chicago, Illinois, where she graduated in 1955. In high school, her placement counselor refused to find her work at a bank because she believed Samuels could not be trusted handling money. This racial bias continued when she studied at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois, which she left after three years of study. She then

worked with the Chicago Urban League, collaborating with celebrities in the Civil Rights Movement including HistoryMaker Harry Belafonte. Samuels's next job was as a copywriter at Formfit-Rogers, a lingerie company. She then became the first black female copywriter at Sears, Roebuck & Co., where she joined HistoryMaker Charles Harrison, the first black male copywriter there. Samuels became a valued writer at Sears, but had to overcome racism and sexual harassment in her early years at the company.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Samuels, Section  
A2003\_301\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:50 2003/12/17

Barbara Samuels describes her career in the retail and fashion industries. Due to her success as a copywriter, Sears Roebuck promoted Samuels to become its first black female retail buyer. In this role, she selected clothing for the 1968 U.S. Olympic Team. Also in 1968, Samuels lived through riots in Chicago, Illinois after the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She describes her efforts to change the culture at Sears, including getting the company dress code changed so that women could wear pants at work. Her three-decades-long career with Sears culminated in Samuels winning the 1998 Buyer of the Year award. In 1993, she retired from Sears, partly due to her concerns about its disproportionate layoffs of African Americans. She then worked in the fashion industry, as a consultant with her own company The Lion's Share, a board member at Fashion Group International, a columnist at N'DIGO, and a teacher at Columbia College in Chicago. She describes her admiration for designer Issey Miyake.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Samuels, Section  
A2003\_301\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:00 2003/12/17

Barbara Samuels shares her impressions on the fashion industry. Samuels credits technology for advances in modern fashion, including the increased use of polyester even by top designers like Giorgio Armani. Viewing the fashions of the corporate world, Samuels notes that black and white businessmen now dress similarly whereas those groups once tried to look distinct. Samuels gives her observations about evolving fashions for black men, from

the brightly colored Italian clothes that were popular in the 1960s to the emphasis on comfort and properly fitting shoes in the hip hop movement. She praises P. Diddy for his clothing line, which she feels has brought hip hop fashion toward more tightly fitting outfits. Samuels goes on to express her desires to begin moving past hip hop apparel as well as to create more affordable clothing for the future of African American fashion. Observing globalization, Samuels expects styles from all over the world to cross over in order to create future trends.

Video Oral History Interview with Barbara Samuels, Section  
A2003\_301\_001\_005, TRT: 0:14:20 2003/12/17

Barbara Samuels expresses her hopes for the futures of the fashion industry and the African American community. Samuels also reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.