

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rachel Noel

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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>	Noel, Rachel Louise, 1918-2008
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rachel Noel,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 22, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:52:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education chief executive Rachel Noel (1918 - 2008 ) was the first African American woman elected public official in the State of Colorado, and the first African American to serve on the University of Colorado Board of Regents. As a member of the Denver Board of Education, she presented the “Noel Resolution,” which required that the school district provide equal education opportunities for every child in Denver. Noel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 22, 2006, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_083
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Educator Rachel Louise Bassette Noel was born on January 15, 1918, in Hampton, Virginia. Both of her parents were college graduates and her father, Andrew William Ernest Bassette, Jr., was a lawyer. They believed in the importance of a higher education and stressed to her the significance of going to college. Noel earned her B.A. degree from Hampton Institute, later named

Hampton University, and she received her M.A. degree in sociology from Fisk University.

Noel married Edmond F. Noel, a physician, in 1942 and the couple moved to Denver, Colorado. In 1965, she became the first African American to be elected to the Denver Board of Education. Having won this seat made her the first African American woman to hold public office in the State of Colorado. In 1968, Noel presented the Board of Education with the “Noel Resolution,” which required that the school district provide equal educational opportunities for every child in Denver. It also called for the superintendent to devise a plan that integrated the school system. After the resolution’s proposal was presented, she received numerous life-threatening phone calls; however, the resolution passed in February, 1970.

Appointed by former Governor Richard Lamm in 1976, Noel became the first African American to serve on the University of Colorado Board of Regents. In 1978, she won statewide election to a six-year term on the board and served a one-year term as chairperson of the board. She has been a professor at Metropolitan State College, as well as chairperson of the school’s African American Studies Department. She also served as a member of the Chancellor’s Advisory Committee for the Health Sciences at the University of Colorado, Boulder and Denver campuses and the Commissioner for the Denver Housing Authority.

Noel received numerous honors and awards including an Honorary Doctor of Public Service degree from the University of Denver; named one of Colorado’s Top 100 Citizens of the Century; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award; and the naming in her honor of a public middle school in Denver, Rachel B. Noel Middle School. In 1981, the Rachel B. Noel Distinguished Professorship was created in her honor at Metropolitan State College. In 2004, the University of Colorado awarded her an Honorary Degree in Humane Letters. Noel passed away on February 4, 2008 at the age of ninety.

Rachel Noel was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 22, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rachel Noel was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 22, 2006, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education chief executive Rachel Noel (1918 - 2008 ) was the first African American woman elected public official in the State of Colorado, and the first African American to serve on the University of Colorado Board of Regents.

As a member of the Denver Board of Education, she presented the “Noel Resolution,” which required that the school district provide equal education opportunities for every child in Denver.

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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:**

Noel, Rachel Louise, 1918-2008

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Noel, Rachel Louise, 1918-2008--Interviews

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African American women college teachers--Colorado--Denver--Interviews

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College trustees--Colorado--Interviews

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School board members--Colorado--Denver--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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Denver Public Schools

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## **Occupations:**

Education Chief Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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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 Rachel Noel, April 22, 2006. 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 Rachel Noel, Section  
A2006\_083\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:25 2006/04/22

Rachel Noel was born on January 15, 1918 to Phoebe Perry Bassette and Andrew W. E. Bassette, Jr. in Hampton, Virginia. Her maternal great grandmother was a slave who worked in her master's bedroom. Her children were light-skinned, although nobody passed for white. A dormitory matron, Noel's maternal grandmother emphasized the importance of education, and reared her children at the schools where she was employed. Noel's mother was born in Wytheville, Virginia. In her senior year at Howard University, she taught briefly in Wheeling,

West Virginia, then completed her degree. Noel's father was born in Hampton, Virginia, where his father practiced law and owned A.W.E. Bassette Elementary School, and his mother was a housewife. Upon graduating from Howard University School of Law, he took the bar exam in Wytheville, and met Noel's mother while staying with her family. The two soon married and had three daughters. Noel grew up attending the A.M.E. church, beginning her schooling at Hampton's Whittier School.

African American families--Virginia--Wytheville.

African American families--Virginia--Hampton.

African American children--Virginia--Wytheville.

Howard University.

African Americans--Education--Virginia--Hampton.

African American teachers--Virginia.

African American lawyers--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Rachel Noel, Section  
A2006\_083\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:22 2006/04/22

Rachel Noel attended Whittier School in Hampton, Virginia from the first through the eleventh grade. Growing up, her family lived on King Street, near downtown Hampton. While her grandfather and father attended First Baptist Church, Noel and her mother attended the Methodist church, where Noel played piano. In 1938, upon graduating as a top student from Hampton, her uncle connected her with his former classmate, Dr. Charles S. Johnson. At Fisk University, she lived with Johnson's family while completing her master's degree in sociology. She also met her husband, Edmond F. Noel, a student at Meharry Medical College. During World War II, she began her career in social work at Southeast Settlement House in Washington, D.C. After her husband completed his military service and his residency at Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis, the couple moved to Denver, Colorado, where he established his medical practice in the Five Points neighborhood. Noel describes other children's perceptions of her fair skin tone.

African Americans--Race identity--Virginia.

African Americans--Education--Virginia--Hampton.

African American children--Virginia--Hampton.

Hampton Institute.

Meharry Medical College.

African American physicians--Colorado--Denver.

Fisk University.

African American teachers--Washington (D.C.).

School boards--African American membership--Colorado--Denver.

Video Oral History Interview with Rachel Noel, Section  
A2006\_083\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:56 2006/04/22

Rachel Noel assisted in integrating the Girl Scouts of Colorado by leading an all-black troop in Denver. As a Girl Scouts national board member, she established a council in Virginia. Noel taught sociology and black studies at Metropolitan State College of Denver. During this time, she also ran successfully for the Denver Board of Education, becoming its first African American member. In 1965, Noel moved to integrate the Denver Public Schools, receiving support from the Denver Ministerial Alliance and the requisite three board members. She reflects upon her board achievements, particularly in terms of policy and her sense of safety. Governor Richard Lamm appointed her to the University of Colorado Board of Regents, and she was elected to a second term. She also describes Shorter Community A.M.E. Church, and Justina Ford, Colorado's first black physician. Noel reflects upon how her parents' work in voter registration in Hampton, Virginia influenced her career. She also talks about her son and daughter.

Denver (Colo.).

Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

School integration--Colorado--Denver.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Lamm, Richard D.

University of Colorado. Board of Regents.

Black power--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Rachel Noel, Section  
A2006\_083\_001\_004, TRT: 0:24:17 2006/04/22

Rachel Noel reflects upon her social activism in Denver, Colorado, as well as Denver Public Schools' history of segregation. She hopes she served as a voice for African Americans, who were historically disenfranchised by Denver's educational system. She describes the leadership of Rachel B. Noel Middle School, which was founded in her name. Noel considers the impact of her parents' social activism in Hampton, Virginia upon her own life's work. She describes her hopes for Denver's African American community, and her husband, Edmond F. Noel's support for her activities. She also reflects upon the importance of community support, how she would like to be remembered, and her life and legacy. She considers how the Denver Board of Education changed from the time of her participation to the time of the interview, when Kevin Patterson, an African American, was a board member. Noel concludes the interview by sharing a message for future generations of children, and narrating her photographs.

African American students--Colorado--Denver.

African Americans--Education--Colorado--Denver.

School integration--Colorado--Denver.

Education, Primary--Colorado--Denver.

Public schools--Colorado--Denver.

Denver (Colo.).