

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ronald McNeil

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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>	McNeil, Ronald Dean, 1952-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 24, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:57:57).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Insurance executive Ronald McNeil (1952 - ) was senior vice president of Allstate Insurance Company and the co-founder of the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc. McNeil was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_160
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Retired insurance executive Ronald Dean McNeil was born on November 4, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to Dorothy and Elijah McNeil, who both emphasized the importance of strong faith, personal accountability and education. While attending Wayne State University where he studied finance and business economics, McNeil answered newly elected Mayor Coleman Young's call for more African Americans to join the Detroit Police Department.

After earning his degree in finance from Wayne State, McNeil joined the Allstate Insurance Corporation. He is well known and highly respected throughout the

insurance industry and is considered by many to be an industry trailblazer. McNeil was the first and only black officer in Finance at Allstate. He was elected to four senior management team positions, served as chairman of two Allstate subsidiaries and was also president of three local Allstate companies. McNeil's vision and innovation is reflected in his major accomplishments which include: 1) The Neighborhood Partnership Program--an initiative which redefined and improved Allstate's relationship with urban communities; 2) The Product Operations organization which changed the way the company priced, underwrote and delivered products to the market place and is the foundation of Allstate's multi-access business model; and 3) Creation of Allstate's first integrated distribution organization where he completely reorganized all aspects of the agency value proposition by channel.

In March, 2007, McNeil retired from Allstate after thirty-one distinguished years of service. At retirement, he was Senior Vice President of Protection Distribution and a member of Allstate's Senior Management Team with fiscal and leadership responsibilities totaling \$30 billion and 70,000 employees, making him the industry's first African American to attain such status. McNeil was personally responsible for the recruitment and/or development of more than a quarter of the most senior leadership group.

In retirement, McNeil and his wife, Regina, focus their time and efforts on The Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc., a private, not-for profit foundation with a focus on providing educational scholarships.

Ronald McNeil was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 24, 2007.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Ronald McNeil was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 24, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Insurance executive Ronald McNeil (1952 - ) was senior vice president of Allstate Insurance Company and the co-founder of the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc.

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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:**

McNeil, Ronald Dean, 1952-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

McNeil, Ronald Dean, 1952---Interviews

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African American executives--Michigan--Detroit--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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Allstate Insurance Company.

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## **Occupations:**

Insurance 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 Ronald McNeil, April 24, 2007. 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

## 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 Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:55 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil was born on November 4, 1952 in Detroit, Michigan to Dorothy Harrison Vary and Elijah L. McNeil, Jr. McNeil's mother was born in Bath, South Carolina to parents who separated when she was young, and was raised by her grandmother while her mother worked. They eventually moved to Detroit, and later were joined by several of her mother's relatives, who relocated to escape the racial discrimination they experienced in the South. McNeil's father was born in Valdosta, Georgia, and migrated with his brothers to find employment in Detroit's automotive industry. For forty-two years, he worked for the Budd Company, a metal parts manufacturer in Detroit. He also taught night courses in Spanish, which he had learned while serving in the U.S. military. In Detroit, McNeil's parents met at the Friendship Baptist Church, married and raised five children. His mother also graduated from Marygrove College, and went on to work for the Department of Human Services.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

Migration, Internal--United States.

African American fathers--Michigan--Detroit.

Fathers and sons.

Racism--Georgia--Valdosta.

Racism--Southern States.

Divorced parents--Michigan--Detroit.

African American parents--Michigan--Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:43 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil grew up on the east side of Detroit, Michigan, where his family belonged to the congregation of the Friendship Baptist Church. As a child, McNeil was athletic and quick tempered. He began his education at Detroit's Marcy Elementary School, and went on to attend Barbour Junior High School, and then Cass Technical High School, where he was a linebacker and the captain of the football team. He also practiced martial arts at a local kempo dojo. Upon graduating from high school, McNeil matriculated at Wayne State University, which was also located in Detroit. While he intended to play football there, he left the team after his first season. Instead, McNeil focused on his business studies and his employment with Lowe Campbell Ewald, an advertising agency. McNeil also worked as an officer of the predominantly white Detroit Police Department, where he received guidance from two senior officers who were African American.

African American children--Social life and customs--Michigan--Detroit.

Detroit (Mich.)--Economic conditions--20th century.

Detroit (Mich.). Police Dept.

African American fathers--Michigan--Detroit.

Fathers and sons--Michigan--Detroit.

African American college students--Michigan--Detroit.  
Wayne State University.

Young, Coleman A.

African American police--Michigan--Detroit.

Detroit (Mich.)--Police--Attitudes.

Detroit (Mich.)--Race relations.

African American police--Recruiting--Michigan--Detroit.

Police brutality--Michigan--Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:51 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil worked as a police officer from 1973 to 1976, while studying finance at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He also worked at Lowe Campbell Ewald, an advertising agency whose clients included the Allstate Corporation. McNeil learned that corporation's regional vice president, Joseph P. Harris, was attempting to integrate the finance department; and obtained a position there in 1976. At the time, the Allstate Corporation was owned by Sears, Roebuck and Co., and McNeil was one of only three black officers. He received support from Harris, as well as Ike Thomas, another African American colleague who worked in human resources. McNeil talks about the exclusion of African Americans from the insurance industry at the time. He also describes the discriminatory practice of redlining; the Allstate Corporation's programs for employees and communities of color, like the Neighborhood Partnership Program; and the company's competitors, including the Farmers Insurance Group.

Detroit (Mich.). Police Dept.

African American police--Michigan--Detroit.

Police--Community relations--Michigan--Detroit.

Mentoring.

Business networks.

Campbell-Ewald Company.

Allstate Insurance Company.

African American executives--Michigan--Detroit.

African American businesspeople--Michigan--Detroit.

Insurance companies--United States--Attitudes.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:38 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil integrated the Allstate Corporation's finance department in 1976. Two years later, he moved to Chicago, Illinois to work as a financial analyst at the company's headquarters. In 1983, he was promoted to regional assistant comptroller of New Jersey; and married his wife, Regina Clark McNeil. After serving as the comptroller of New Jersey, and then of Florida, McNeil returned to Chicago as an assistant vice president of

finance. He went on to serve as the vice president of the Valley Forge region from 1991 to 1994. In this role, he supervised the company's operations in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Delaware; and developed the Neighborhood Partnership Program, which facilitated access to insurance in urban communities of color. He talks about the leadership opportunities at the Allstate Corporation; and reflects upon his conversations with his father, Elijah L. McNeil, Jr., about his career. McNeil concludes this part of the interview by narrating his photographs.

Allstate Insurance Company.

African American executives.

African Americans--Careers & opportunities--United States.

African American fathers.

African Americans--Marriage.

Father and sons.

Allstate Insurance Company--Pennsylvania--Valley Forge.

African American neighborhoods--Pennsylvania--Valley Forge.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:38 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil became a senior vice president at the Allstate Corporation in 1994, initially working in corporate relations. After four years, he moved to product operations, where he used risk based market segmentation to develop a pricing strategy for the company's property insurance products. In 2003, McNeil became the senior vice president of distribution, and served in that position until his retirement in 2007. During this time, he consolidated the firm's distribution channels, and introduced a segmented compensation approach for employees. At this point in the interview, McNeil explains the concept of market segmentation, and talks about his management style and guiding principles. After being passed over for the presidency of the Allstate Corporation, McNeil retired early, at the age of fifty-five years old. He and his wife, Regina Clark McNeil, cofounded the Ronald

D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc., which provided academic scholarships to economically disadvantaged students.

Allstate Insurance Company.

African American executives.

African American executives--Retirement.

Mentoring.

Non-profit organizations--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald McNeil, Section  
A2007\_160\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:12 2007/04/24

Ronald McNeil retired from the Allstate Corporation as senior vice president of distribution in 2007. From that time, he devoted himself to his role as treasurer of the Ronald D. and Regina C. McNeil Foundation, Inc., an educational nonprofit organization where his wife, Regina Clark McNeil, served as president. McNeil also served on the boards of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. He talks about Hurricane Katrina, which caused severe property damage on the Gulf Coast in 2005, and its impact on the Allstate Corporation and the insurance industry at large. He also describes the relationship between the insurance industry and communities of color, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. McNeil reflects upon his life and legacy, his family and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Insurance companies--United States--Attitudes.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

African Americans--Social conditions--United States.

Non-profit organizations--United States.