

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Percy Pierre

PERSON

Pierre, Percy A.

**Alternative Names:** Percy Pierre;

**Life Dates:** January 3, 1939-

**Place of Birth:** Welcome, Louisiana, USA

**Residence:** Chevy Chase, MD

**Occupations:** Electrical Engineer;

## Biographical Note

Electrical engineer Percy A. Pierre was born on January 1, 1939 in Welcome, Louisiana to Rosa Villavaso and Percy John Pierre. Pierre graduated from St. Augustine High School in New Orleans in 1957. Reverend Matthew O'Rourke, the school's founding principal and president, served as one of Pierre's mentors. It was in his senior year of high school that Pierre first decided to enter the field of engineering. Pierre received his B.S. degree in electrical engineering from the University of Notre Dame in

1961. He stayed at the University and received his M.S. degree in 1963. Pierre went on to receive his Ph.D. degree in electrical engineering from John Hopkins University in 1967. He is the first African American in the country to earn a Ph.D. degree in electrical engineering.

After graduation, Pierre began a series of successful posts in government and higher education. In 1969, Pierre was selected to serve as a White House Fellow and Deputy to the Assistant to the President for Urban Affairs. In 1971, he joined the faculty of Howard University as Dean of the School of Engineering. As dean, Pierre was instrumental in the founding of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME). In 1977, he left Howard University to serve as Assistant Secretary to the United States Army for Research, Development, and Acquisition, where he managed a \$12 billion budget. Pierre started his own consulting business, Percy A. and Associates in 1981. He returned to academia in 1983, serving as President of Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical (A&M) University, and later as Honeywell Professor of Electrical Engineering.

Pierre came to Michigan State University in 1990 as Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies. In 1995, he became a professor of electrical and computer engineering. Pierre has taught courses and participated in research in the areas of signals and systems, random processes, and signal detection and estimation. He believes his greatest achievement in his field to be the exploration of linear functions and their properties. In addition to his research, Pierre has also created numerous programs to increase the financial support and mentoring opportunities available for minority graduate engineering students; most notably creating the Sloan Engineering Program in 1998. Pierre has served on many boards, including the National Security Advisory Board and the Defense Science Board. He was honored with the Founders Award from NACME in 2004 in celebration of the organization's

thirtieth anniversary. He also received the Mentor Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2008. Pierre is married to Olga A. Markham and they have two grown daughters, Kristin Clare and Allison Celeste.

Percy A. Pierre was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 13, 2012.

## Related Entries

**St. Joan Of Arc Elem School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**St. Augustine High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Diploma**

**University of Notre Dame** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**M.S.**

**Johns Hopkins University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Ph.D.**

**University of Michigan** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Postdoctoral**

**RAND Corporation** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1981 to 1988]

**Researcher**

**White House** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1969 to 1970]

**White House Fellow**

**Howard University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1967 to 1989]

**Dean of the School of Engineering**

**Alfred P. Sloan Foundation** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to 1975]

**Program officer**

**Department of the Army for Research, Development  
and Acquisition** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to ?]

**Assistant Secretary**

**Percy A. Pierre & Associates** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1973 to ?]

**President**

**Prairie View A&M University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1958 to ?]

**President**

**Prairie View A&M University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1979 to ?]

**Honeywell Professor of Electrical Engineering**

**Michigan State University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1969 to ?]

**Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies  
and Professor of Electrical Engineering**

**Michigan State University** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1995 to ?]

**Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering**

**Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers  
(IEEE)** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Society** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (Boule)** [MEMBEROF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**