

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

PERSON

Pierre, Percy , 1939-

**Alternative Names:** Pierre, Percy , 1939-;

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

**Place of Birth:** Welcome, Louisiana

**Residence:** East Lansing, Michigan

**Occupations:** Electrical Engineer

## Biographical Note

Electrical engineer Percy A. Pierre was born on January 3, 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, after which he did a year of post-doctoral work at the University of Michigan. 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 appointed to serve as a White House Fellow in the Office of the President, 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 and accepted a presidential appointment 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 the 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 full-time 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, 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. For his work at the Defense Department and his contributions to minority engineering education, in 2009, he was elected to the National Academy of Engineering. 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 19, 2012.

## Related Entries

**Nicholas, Odalie** [GRANDCHILD OF]  
**Maternal Grandmother**

**Pierre, Joanne** [SIBLING OF]  
**Sister**

**Pierre, Allison** [PARENT OF]  
**Daughter**

**Pierre, Kristin** [PARENT OF]  
**Daughter**

**Pierre, Adolph** [GRANDCHILD OF]  
**Paternal Grandfather**

**Gregoire, Celeste** [GRANDCHILD OF]

**Paternal Grandmother**

**Villavaso, Ferdinand** [GRANDCHILD<sub>OF</sub>]

**Maternal Grandfather**

**Pierre, Percy** [CHILD<sub>OF</sub>]

**Father**

**Singleton, Rosalynn** [SIBLING<sub>OF</sub>]

**Sister**

**Villavaso, Rosa** [CHILD<sub>OF</sub>]

**Mother**

**St Joan Of Arc Elem School** [STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

[from ? to 1953-05]

**St. Augustine High School** [STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

[from ? to 1957-05]

**Diploma**

**University of Notre Dame** [STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

[from ? to 1963]

**M.S.**

**Johns Hopkins University** [STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

[from ? to 1967]

**Ph.D.**

[STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

**University of Michigan** [STUDENT<sub>OF</sub>]

[from ? to 1968]

**Postdoctoral**

**The RAND Corporation** [EMPLOYEE<sub>OF</sub>]

[from 1968 to 1971]

**Researcher**

**Executive Office of the President** [EMPLOYEE<sub>OF</sub>]

[from 1969 to 1970]

**White House Fellow**

**Howard University** [EMPLOYEE<sub>OF</sub>]

[from 1971 to 1977]

**Dean of the School of Engineering**

**The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1973 to 1975]

**Program officer**

**Department of the Army for Research, Development and Acquisition**

[EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1977 to 1981]

**Assistant Secretary**

**Percy A. Pierre & Associates** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1981 to 1983]

**President**

**Prairie View A&M University** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1983 to 1989]

**President**

**Prairie View A&M University** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1989 to 1990]

**Honeywell Professor of Electrical Engineering**

**Michigan State University** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1990 to 1995]

**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** [MEMBEROF]

**Member**

**Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honor Society** [MEMBEROF]

**Member**

**Sigma Xi Science Honor Society** [MEMBEROF]

**Member**

**Sigma Pi Phi** [MEMBEROF]

**Member**

