

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Winifred Neisser

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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>	Neisser, Winifred White, 1953-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 17, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:30:23).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Television executive Winifred Neisser (1953 - ) served as Vice President of Movies and Miniseries and Vice President of Family Programming for NBC Productions, and went on to become Senior Vice President of Movies for Television and Miniseries for Sony Pictures Television. Neisser was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 17, 2013, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_299
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Television executive Winifred White Neisser received her B.A. degree with honors from Harvard University's Radcliffe College in 1974. She received her M.A. degree in Elementary Education from Lesley College. Neisser also completed further graduate work in Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Upon graduation, Neisser was hired at NBC where she headed several major divisions. While there, she served as Vice President of Family Programming, Director of Movies for Television and Vice President of

Television Movies, NBC Productions. As vice president of family programming at NBC, Neisser oversaw special programming for children and families, including the award-winning miniseries titled, “Jim Henson’s The Storyteller.” Neisser then joined Sony Pictures Television where she served as Senior Vice President of Movies for Television and Miniseries. Neisser has served on the board of directors for several academic and non-profit institutes. At Harvard University, Neisser was appointed to the Harvard Board of Overseers as well as the Radcliffe Institute’s Advisory Board. She served as Trustee on the board of the Otis College of Design and The Center for Early Education. Neisser was a member of the Television Academy’s Board of Governors for several years. She also served on the boards of Planned Parenthood and the National Guild of Community Arts Schools. Neisser’s award-winning projects include “A Raisin in the Sun” for ABC, which was nominated for three Emmy Awards and won the Humanitas Award; “Broken Trail,” a western for AMC, which won four Emmy Awards including “Best Miniseries”; “The Company,” a miniseries about the CIA which won the DGA Award and the WGA Award; “Having Our Stay: The Delaney Sisters First 100 Years,” which won a Christopher Award and a Peabody Award; “The Crossing” for the Arts and Entertainment Channel (A & E), which won the Peabody award; “The Beach Boys: An American Family,” which was nominated for an Emmy Award in the category of Best Miniseries; and “Call me Claus,” a Christmas movie which starred Whoopi Goldberg and featured music by Garth Brooks. Neisser is married to Ken Neisser. They live in Los Angeles and have two children, Nick and Alexis. Winifred White Neisser was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 17, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Winifred Neisser was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 17, 2013, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television executive Winifred Neisser (1953 - ) served as Vice President of Movies and Miniseries and Vice President of Family Programming for NBC Productions, and went on to become Senior Vice President of Movies for Television and Miniseries for Sony Pictures Television.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

## 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:

Neisser, Winifred White, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Neisser, Winifred White, 1953---Interviews

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## Organizations:

## **Occupations:**

Television Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EntertainmentMakers

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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 Winifred Neisser, November 17, 2013. 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 Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:28 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser was born on March 23, 1953 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Winifred Parker White and Walter White, Sr. Neisser's maternal grandfather, Frederick Parker, was born to a family of coalminers in Pennsylvania. He left to attend Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C., and went on to study at Amherst College and Harvard University. He secured work as a math teacher in Virginia, where he met Neisser's grandmother, Frieda Campbell Parker. The couple then moved to Indianapolis, where Neisser's maternal grandfather taught at Crispus Attucks High School. Neisser's paternal grandmother, Viaria Rucker White, was born in Oklahoma, and moved with her family to Paris, Texas. There, she married War World I veteran Luther White at the age of thirteen years old. Neisser's father left Paris due to the increasing violence against African Americans, and found work in the steel mills of Gary, Indiana. After serving in World War II, he enrolled at Purdue University, where he met Neisser's mother.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:02 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser's parents, Winifred Parker White and dentist Walter White, Sr., settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where her father joined an all-black medical practice. Neisser was the oldest of her parents' four children, and her best friend, Emlee Hilliard Smith, was the daughter of her father's medical partner, George Hilliard. Neisser's mother was active with the NAACP and the Parent Teacher Association at Emanuel L. Philipp Elementary School, where Neisser began her education.

Under her parents' influence, she excelled as a student and skipped a semester of the seventh grade. After she completed middle school, Neisser moved with her family to the rural town of Mequon, Wisconsin, where she attended Homestead High School from 1966 to 1970. She was the only black student in her class, and her peers often touched her hair and asked ignorant questions. During this time, Neisser's parents were harassed by their white neighbors, and they hid the threats from Neisser and her siblings.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:40 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser excelled as a student at Homestead High School in Mequon, Wisconsin, where she joined the choir, Russian club and student newspaper staff. At home, she was exposed to numerous African American periodicals, including Jet and Ebony magazines and black newspapers like the Milwaukee Courier. She also enjoyed watching black celebrities like Sammy Davis Jr. appear on 'The Ed Sullivan Show,' although she did not aspire to join the broadcast industry at the time. Neisser graduated from high school at the top of her class, and enrolled at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1970. She was one of thirty African Americans in a class of three hundred women, and majored in linguistics with a concentration on linguistic psychology. Outside of class, Neisser active in the theater community on campus. She starred in the university's production of 'Guys and Dolls,' and helped create the original play 'Harlem in the Evening,' which was based on the poetry of Langston Hughes.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:28 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser studied at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1970 to 1974. She attended during the tenure of black faculty and administrators like Archie C. Epps, III, David L. Evans and Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr.; and Cornel West was among her classmates. Neisser was involved in the university's theater productions, and was also active with community organizations like the Phillips Brooks House

in Boston, Massachusetts. She joined the black student association, attended lectures by Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and author Alice Walker, and participated in civil rights demonstrations and protests against the Vietnam War. Upon graduating in 1974, Neisser began a master's degree in education at Lesley College, and concurrently taught at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts. She later accepted a teaching position at the Caribbean School in Ponce, Puerto Rico, where she moved in 1976. While teaching multilingual pupils, Neisser developed an interest in educational television.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:25 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser entered the communications program at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1978. That year, she secured her first position in the broadcast industry at WMTV-TV, where she was tasked with creating the channel's children's programming. In 1980, the station manager, Thomas Bolger, recommended Neisser for the management training program at NBC. She accepted a position in Los Angeles, California; and, after one year, went to work for Phyllis Tucker Vinson Jackson, the head of children's programming at NBC. In 1981, Neisser became the manager of NBC's Project Peacock, where she produced primetime children's specials. She went on to become the vice president of family programming, and worked with the Muppets creator Jim Henson to create 'The Storyteller.' During the 1990s, children's television became less profitable due to changes in broadcasting regulations. Neisser transitioned to the television movie division of NBC, where she produced the screen adaptations of Danielle Steel's novels.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section  
A2013\_299\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:47 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser served as the vice president of movies and miniseries at NBC until 1994, when the network's movie production departments were restructured. Neisser planned to leave the broadcast industry in 1995, but was offered the position of senior vice president of movies for television and miniseries at Columbia TriStar Television. There, Neisser worked on multiple award winning

programs, including 'Broken Trail' which won four Emmy Awards; and 'Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years,' which received a Christopher Award and George Foster Peabody Award. Neisser worked closely with Suzanne De Passe, and was a producer on 'Call Me Claus,' 'Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story,' 'Steel Magnolias' and the 'Jesse Stone' movie series. At this point in the interview, Neisser talks about the changes in the television industry, and her interest in stories that challenge racial stereotypes. She also describes her current projects, which included a 'Bonnie and Clyde' miniseries.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section A2013\_299\_001\_007, TRT: 7:26:03 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser married Kenneth Neisser in 1989. Together, they raised two children, Alexis Neisser and Nicholas Neisser. At this point in the interview, Neisser talks about the lack of African American representation in the broadcast media industry, especially at the executive level. She also describes her plans for the future, and her advice to aspiring television professionals. Neisser reflects upon her life, legacy and concerns for the African American community. She concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Winifred Neisser, Section A2013\_299\_001\_008, TRT: 8:08:30 2013/11/17

Winifred Neisser narrates her photographs.