

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey

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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>	Lavizzo-Mourey, Risa
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 14, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:52:37).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Non-profit executive Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey (1954 - ) advised on health policies for the Bush and Clinton administrations, and became president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2002. Lavizzo-Mourey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_038
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Non-profit executive Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey was born on September 25, 1954 in Seattle, Washington to Dr. Blanche Sellers-Lavizzo and Dr. Philip Lavizzo. She attended the University of Washington before transferring to the State University of New York-Stony Brook for two years. Lavizzo-Mourey then continued her education at Harvard Medical School, graduating in 1979. In 1984, she was selected as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar, and earned her M.B.A. degree in health policy from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1986.

Lavizzo-Mourey joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania as an assistant professor. During her tenure, she served as the director of the Institute on Aging from 1984 to 1992. She took a leave of absence from the university to work as deputy administrator for the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research under President George H.W. Bush's administration. Lavizzo-Mourey then served as quality of care chair for President Bill Clinton's panels on health care until 1994, when she returned to the University of Pennsylvania as a professor. Lavizzo-Mourey served as the associate executive vice president for health policy for the health system from 1994 to 2001, and the Sylvan Eisman professor of medicine and health care systems at the university from 1997 to 2002. In 2001, Lavizzo-Mourey was hired as a senior vice president of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and was appointed to serve as the president and CEO of the foundation in 2003. While at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Lavizzo-Mourey continued to see patients at a clinic in New Jersey, and launched an influential campaign against childhood obesity in 2007. The initiative decreased the obesity rate among children aged two to five years and halted its rise among those aged two to nineteen years.

Lavizzo-Mourey was the recipient of numerous awards, including twenty honorary doctorates from institutions like Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, Tufts University, Morehouse School of Medicine, Meharry Medical College and Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science. She appeared on *Forbes'* list of the most important women in the world eight times, and as one of Modern Healthcare's one hundred most influential people in health care eleven times.

Lavizzo-Mourey and her husband, Robert Lavizzo-Mourey, have two adult children.

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 14, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 14, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Non-profit executive Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey (1954 - ) advised on health policies for the Bush and Clinton administrations, and became president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2002.

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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:

Lavizzo-Mourey, Risa

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Nonprofit Chief Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|MedicalMakers

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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 Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, December 14, 2016. 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

## 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 Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_001, TRT: 1:27:35 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey was born on September 25, 1954 in Nashville, Tennessee to Blanche Sellers Lavizzo and Philip V. Lavizzo. Her maternal great-great-grandfather was a freed slave who owned five hundred acres of farmland in Baxley, Georgia. Lavizzo-Mourey's maternal grandparents, Lilla Anderson Sellers and Samuel Garrett Sellers, lived in Atlanta, Georgia, where her maternal grandfather owned the Sellers Brothers Funeral Home, and Lavizzo-Mourey's maternal family attended Martin Luther King, Sr.'s church, Ebenezer Baptist Church. Her paternal great-grandfather, Giuseppe Lavizzo, emigrated from Naples, Italy to New Orleans, Louisiana in 1860. Lavizzo-Mourey's father was one of ten children born to contractor Joseph V. Lavizzo and Aurelia Powers Lavizzo. He attended Meharry Medical College, where he met Lavizzo-Mourey's mother, who was also a graduate of Spelman College. In 1952, her father authored the paper, 'Observations on the General Adaptation Syndrome: Surgery as Measured by the Eosinophil Response.'

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_002, TRT: 2:26:37 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey and her three siblings grew up in the diverse middle-class neighborhood of Mount Baker in Seattle, Washington. She began her education at the Our

Lady of Mount Virgin School, and in the third grade, transferred to John Muir Elementary School. There, she did well academically, but experienced discrimination from one of her white teachers who unfairly marked a scientific question wrong on her test. Her father produced medical documents that proved her answer was correct, and her teacher corrected the grade. Together, her parents, Blanche Sellers Lavizzo and Philip V. Lavizzo, established a private practice in the Central District of Seattle, where Lavizzo-Mourey spent every Saturday morning as a child. She attended Asa Mercer Junior High School, where girls were not challenged intellectually, so her parents transferred her to The Bush School, a private all-girls school in Seattle. Lavizzo-Mourey describes the discrimination that her parents faced as doctors in Seattle.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_003, TRT: 3:27:46 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey began her education at the affluent all-girls The Bush School in Seattle, Washington in 1968, where she was one of the only black girls in her class. She excelled academically, and aspired to attend Yale University to become a physician like her parents, Blanche Sellers Lavizzo and Philip V. Lavizzo. Upon graduating from high school in 1972, Lavizzo-Mourey decided to stay in Seattle to help care for her siblings, when her father became ill with Parkinson's disease. She attended the University of Washington for a year before transferring to Stony Brook University in New York City, where she studied medicine. There, she was influenced by her professor, physician H. Jack Geiger, who taught her about the healthcare system. After completing her science requirements and passing the MCAT, Lavizzo-Mourey was accepted into Harvard Medical School in 1974. She recalls assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was a close friend of her mother.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_004, TRT: 4:27:23 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey matriculated at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts in 1975, where one of her classmates was Dr. Augustus A. White, III, and she was mentored by Harold Amos, who the chair of the

school's first African American department. Although there was no formal black student organization at the time, Dr. Alvin Poussaint, the dean of students, served as an advocate for the black students, specifically when microbiology professor Bernard D. Davis published an article, which argued that affirmative action in medical schools led to the admittance of incompetent black medical students. During her clinical rotations, Lavizzo-Mourey often faced discrimination both as an African American and as a woman. She joined a women's group during her third year in medical school, where she befriended politician Jill Stein. Lavizzo-Mourey graduated in 1979, and began her residency at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston, where she first became interested in comprehensive care.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:49 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey completed her residency at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in 1982, and became a clinical instructor at the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1983, she was chosen as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. There, she trained as a geriatrician, and obtained her M.B.A. degree in health policy. She graduated in 1986, and was hired as an academic physician at the University of Pennsylvania, where she taught geriatrics, and served as faculty advisor of the W.E.B. Du Bois College House. She also worked as the attending physician at the hospital, where she initiated a house call program. In 1992, Dr. Louis Sullivan recruited her as deputy administrator of the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, where she worked with first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on the Health Security Act of 1993, a universal health insurance bill, which was later defeated in U.S. Congress in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, Section A2016\_038\_001\_006, TRT: 6:33:27 2016/12/14

Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey returned to the University of Pennsylvania to teach in 1994. Later that year, she co-authored a paper on the correlation between physiological

stress from racial discrimination and chronic illnesses, such as high blood pressure. In 1997, she was named the Sylvan Eisman Professor of Medicine and Health Care Systems at the University of Pennsylvania. Then in 2001, she was recruited as senior vice president to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; and in the following year, became the first African American president and CEO of the company. Lavizzo-Mourey and First Lady Michelle Obama launched a campaign to combat childhood obesity, by providing children with access to healthy foods, and encouraging children to drink more water, and engage in physical activity. In 2016, Lavizzo-Mourey stepped down as president of the foundation. Lavizzo-Mourey reflects upon her legacy, life and family; and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.