

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Merline Pitre

PERSON

Pitre, Merline, 1943-

Alternative Names: Merline Pitre;

Life Dates: April 10, 1943-

Place of Birth: Opelousas, Louisiana, USA

Residence: Houston, TX

Work: Houston, TX

Occupations: History Professor; Educator

Biographical Note

Historian and educator Merline Pitre was born on April 10, 1943 in Opelousas, Louisiana to Robert and Florence Pitre. Pitre graduated from Plaisance School in Plaisance, Louisiana; and went on to earn her B.S. degree in French from Southern University, and her M.A. degree in French from Atlanta University. She also earned her second M.A. degree and Ph.D. degree in history from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1972 and 1976, respectively.

In 1967, Pitre taught French at St. Augustine College in Raleigh, North Carolina before returning to her hometown in 1971 to teach French at Plaisance High School. After receiving her Ph.D. degree, Pitre was hired as an assistant professor of history at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. In 1980, she served as group leader for the Texas Consortium of Black Colleges and Universities trip to Haiti, and then as group leader in 1981 for the Texas Southern University Fulbright Fellows Trip to Haiti and Santo Domingo. From 1983 to 1985, Pitre served as the associate dean for the College of Liberal Arts & Behavioral Sciences at Texas Southern University, later serving as dean of the college from 1990 to 1994 and again from 2000 to 2008.

Pitre released her first book in 1985, *Through Many Dangers, Toils and Snares: The Black Leadership of Texas, 1868 to 1898*. Pitre's book *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957*, was published in 1999. She also served as co-editor, with Bruce Glasrud, of the 2008 book *Black Women in Texas History*, and the 2013 book *Southern Black Women in the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. During her career at Texas Southern University, Pitre served on the boards of several organizations. She was on the 1993 Editorial Advisory Committee of *The Griot Journal*

for the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc., and served as president of SCAASI from 2007 to 2008. She also served on the nominating board for the Organization of American Historians, and the advisory committee of the OAH Magazine of History. In 2011, she became the first African American president of the Texas State Historical Association. During that time, she also became the editor of the African American Handbook of Texas. She authored the book *Born to Serve: A History of Texas Southern University*, published in 2018.

Pitre received numerous awards for her work over the years, including the Liz Carpenter Award from the Texas State Historical Association in 2008 and 2014. She was also named the 1988 Outstanding Black Texan by the Texas Legislative Black Caucus, and awarded the Black Caucus Award in 1989. She received the Lorraine Williams Leadership Award from the Association of Black Women Historians in 2014, and Texas Southern University named her the 1987 Scholar of the Year, in addition to awarding her the 2014 President Achievement Award. She received special recognition for her research from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

Merline Pitre was interviewed by The Historymakers on November 28, 2016.

Related Entries

Plaisance High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Southern University and Agricultural and Mechanical College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.S.

Clark Atlanta University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.A.

Temple University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.A.

Temple University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

St. Augustine's College [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to 1970]

Instructor of French

Plaisance High School [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1971 to 1972]

Teacher of French

Texas Southern University [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1976 to 2016]

Professor of History

Black Women Historians [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

ASLAH [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Member

TCH [MEMBEROF]

[from 1990 to 1996]

Member

OAH [MEMBEROF]

[from 2000 to 2006]

Nominating Board

SCAASI [MEMBEROF]

[from 2007 to 2008]

President

Texas State Historical Association [MEMBEROF]

[from 2011 to 2012]

President