

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gabriella E. Morris

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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>	Morris, Gabriella E., 1956-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 27, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:36:09).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Foundation chief executive Gabriella E. Morris (1956 - ) worked for twenty-seven years in senior legal, philanthropic and community relations positions at Prudential Financial. Morris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 27, 2017, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_074
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Foundation chief executive Gabriella E. Morris was born on March 26, 1956 in Houston, Texas to Elise LeNoir Morris and John E. Morris. After graduating from high school, Morris received her A.B. degree in architecture and urban planning, and a certificate in African American studies, from Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey in 1978. She later earned her J.D. degree from the University of Texas Law School in Austin, Texas. Morris has also received certifications from Harvard Business School's Executive Education program in corporate social responsibility, and from Stanford University's Center for Social Innovation.

Morris was hired as real estate council for The Southland Corporation in Dallas, Texas. She then became associate counsel of the Houston-based law firm of Baker and Botts in its securities, real estate and oil and gas practices. In 1985, she was hired by Prudential Financial as a regional counsel and associate general counsel for the company's real estate operations. Morris then became president of the Prudential Foundation in 1994, and also served as vice president of community resources. In that position, Morris helped develop a number of community programs focused on education, including the Prudential Young Entrepreneurs Program, founded in 1999. She also helped form the New Jersey Statewide Education Summit, which aided the development of new education standards for the City of Newark and was influential in creating one of the first charter school lending programs in the nation. After over twenty years of service, Morris left Prudential in order to form her own consulting firm, Connective Advisors LLC. In 2014, she was named as the senior vice president of the UNICEF Bridge Fund.

In addition to her professional career, Morris has been involved in her community through membership in many organizations. She was a founding member of United States Artists, the Brick City Development Corporation, and the Newark Trust for Education. Morris also served as a board member for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Harlem School of the Arts, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center Women's Association, NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

Gabriella E. Morris was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 27, 2017.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gabriella E. Morris was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 27, 2017, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Foundation chief executive Gabriella E. Morris (1956 - ) worked for twenty-seven years in senior legal, philanthropic and community relations positions at Prudential Financial.

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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:

Morris, Gabriella E., 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Morris, Gabriella E., 1956- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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## The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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### Occupations:

Legal Advisor

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Foundation Chief Executive

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|LawMakers

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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 Gabriella E. Morris, March 27, 2017. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:40 ?

Gabriella E. Morris was born on March 26, 1956 in Houston, Texas, and was adopted as an infant by Elise LeNoir Morris and John Morris. Her adoptive maternal great-grandmother was a Creole woman from New Orleans, Louisiana,

who raised thirteen children, including Morris' maternal grandmother, Ivy Darensbourg LeNoir. Morris' maternal grandfather was born in Jayess, Mississippi, and later moved to New Orleans. Morris' mother attended Xavier University of Louisiana. There, she met Morris' father, who had moved from Meridian, Mississippi. She convinced him to pursue a lucrative job on the railroad instead of a medical degree, and they moved to Houston, where he worked on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Morris grew up in Houston's Clinton Park neighborhood with her two older adoptive siblings. She attended Clinton Park Elementary School in Houston and Fidelity Elementary School in Galena Park, Texas, and then transferred to a Catholic school at nine years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:23 ?

Gabriella E. Morris grew up in Houston, Texas during the 1960s. She was an inquisitive student, and skipped a grade during elementary school. At eleven years old, Morris enrolled at the Incarnate Word Academy, a predominantly white Catholic school in Houston. There, she became involved in the student government, and served as class president during her junior year. She also experienced discrimination from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, who operated the school. They removed Morris' name from the honor roll, and discouraged her from pursuing a college education. Nevertheless, Morris aspired to become a lawyer. She was influenced by her maternal uncles, two of whom were attorneys; as well as her friend's father, the noted architect John S. Chase. Upon graduating from high school in 1973, Morris enrolled in one of the largest classes of African American undergraduates at Princeton University. There, she studied architecture and urban planning.

Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:11 ?

Gabriella E. Morris attended Princeton University during the Watergate hearings of 1973, and protested against the school's decision to host a debate between Roy Innis and William Shockley. Upon graduating with an architecture degree in 1977, Morris matriculated at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin. There, she befriended Rodney Ellis, a classmate and future senator. In the summer after her first year, Morris interned at Vinson and Elkins LLP. The next year, she worked for the law firm of Baker Botts LLP. Both firms employed very few women or African Americans. Upon graduating, Morris was hired as Baker Botts' second full-time black employee. Morris spent three years at Baker Botts LLP, and became skilled at writing case briefs. After marrying Leonard S. Coleman, Jr. in 1985, Morris moved to Newark, New Jersey, where she was hired to work in real estate law at Prudential Financial, Inc. There, Morris was one of very few female attorneys.

Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:55 ?

Gabriella E. Morris was selected to become the president of the Prudential Foundation in 1994, because of her previous experience on nonprofit boards. During her tenure, the foundation worked closely with the surrounding community of Newark, New Jersey. She supported the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, sponsored trainings for teachers and parents and, at one point, funded over half of the city's charter schools. Morris also helped pioneer Global Volunteer Day, in which employees of Prudential Financial, Inc. and their children volunteered with local causes. In 1999, Morris launched the Prudential Young Entrepreneur Program, which provided young people with classroom instruction, mentorship and the opportunity to apply for startup loans.

Morris also sat on the founding board of directors for Newark's Brick City Development Corporation, and led the Prudential Foundation to fund fifty artists as part of the United States Artists initiative. Morris retired from the Prudential Foundation in 2012.

Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_005, TRT: 5:27:55 ?

Gabriella E. Morris served as president of the Prudential Foundation until her retirement in 2012. At that time, she founded a nonprofit management consulting firm called Connective Advisors LLC. Her first major client was the United States Fund for UNICEF, which Morris joined two years later as a senior vice president. In that role, she worked with the UNICEF Bridge Fund to make resources more immediately available during humanitarian crises. Morris was involved with numerous nonprofit boards, and was a founding trustee of the Newark Trust for Education. She also served on the board of the Harlem School of the Arts and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. She shares her plans for the future, and talks about her family. Morris also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She reflects upon her life and legacy, and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Gabriella E. Morris, Section A2017\_074\_001\_006, TRT: 6:08:05 ?

Gabriella E. Morris narrates her photographs.