

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Muriel Petioni

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Petioni, Muriel 1914-2011
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni,
Dates:	May 18, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:24:00).
Abstract:	Community leader and school physician Dr. Muriel Petioni (1914 - 2011) is a community health worker in Harlem, New York. Petioni opened a private medical practice in Harlem, which she operated for forty years. Dr. Petioni also served for thirty years as a school physician in Central Harlem for the New York City Department of Health. In 1974, Petioni founded the Susan Smith McKinney Steward Medical Society for Women, a professional association for black women physicians. Petioni was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 18, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_056
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

From the beginning, Dr. Muriel Petioni was destined to become a doctor. Born on January 1, 1914, into a family with a formidable medical tradition-nine of her family members are doctors-she spent her early childhood years in Trinidad and Tobago before moving with her family to Harlem, New York, where her father set up a private practice. Petioni soon followed in her father's footsteps, graduating with a B.S. from Howard University in 1934, and graduating from Howard University Medical School three years later.

After a two-year internship at Harlem Hospital Center from 1937 to 1939, Dr. Petioni became a college physician at several universities, and in 1942, she married a Tuskegee Airman named Mal Woolfolk. In 1947, a year after Woolfolk had returned from the war, the couple had their first and only son, Charles Woolfolk. Dr. Petioni took a break from medicine and spent the next three years as a housewife and mother.

In 1950, she returned not only to her profession, but also to her home, in Harlem, and set up a private practice in the very same office her father had used for his practice. She would continue this practice for forty years, tirelessly serving the Harlem community. A medical doctor, educator and community activist, she has worked diligently to ensure that underserved communities receive proper medical attention and equitable access to health care.

Dr. Petioni served for thirty years as a school physician in Central Harlem for the New York City Department of Health, as well as the supervising physician for Central Harlem and East Harlem from 1980 to 1984. She currently sits on the board for the Harlem Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone and is chair and founder of the Friends of Harlem Hospital Center, organized in 1987 to raise funds and provide support for the 114-year-old hospital. The advancement of women in medicine has always been important to Dr. Petioni, and in 1974, she founded the Susan

Smith McKinney Steward Medical Society for Women, a professional association for black women physicians. This organization has been instrumental in providing institutional support for women in medical profession in the Greater New York area. In her work with the Coalition of 100 Black Women, Petioni has developed a mentorship program that guides young black women into careers in medicine.

Dr. Petioni is the recipient of numerous awards, honors and recognitions, too numerous to list. As she enters her sixth decade of community health work in Harlem, Dr. Petioni's remarkable energy, passion and dedication remain undiminished.

Dr. Petioni passed away on December, 6, 2011 at the age of 97.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 18, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community leader and school physician Dr. Muriel Petioni (1914 - 2011) is a community health worker in Harlem, New York. Petioni opened a private medical practice in Harlem, which she operated for forty years. Dr. Petioni also served for thirty years as a school physician in Central Harlem for the New York City Department of Health. In 1974, Petioni founded the Susan Smith McKinney Steward Medical Society for Women, a professional association for black women physicians.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Petioni, Muriel 1914-2011

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Petioni, Muriel 1914-2011--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

New York (N.Y.). Dept. of Health

Occupations:

School Physician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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. Muriel Petioni, May 18, 2001. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_001, TRT: 0:28:10
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Dr. Muriel Petioni talks about her parents' background in Trinidad and details the origin of her surname. She then discusses at length her father's personality and penchant for being resourceful with money. Dr. Petioni talks about her father's career in journalism, and his political activism that forced the family to emigrate from Trinidad to the United States. Lastly Dr. Petioni discusses her father's association with Marcus Garvey, and his career change from journalism to medicine.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_002, TRT: 0:28:01
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Dr. Muriel Petioni recalls her father's decision to attend Howard University College of Medicine. She then details family life and the living conditions in Harlem while her father was away at school. Dr. Petioni talks about her formal education as a child and talks about her father's networking skills with other physicians in Harlem. She then talks about career opportunities for women in the 1930s. Lastly, Dr. Petioni discusses the friction between African Americans and black West Indians that exists in the United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_003, TRT: 0:29:31
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Dr. Muriel Petioni talks about her early aspirations to follow in her father's footsteps as a physician. She then talks about her experiences at Howard University Medical College, and describes the environment at Harlem Hospital in the 1930s, where she did her internship. Lastly, Dr. Petioni then describes the various medical positions she held at the urging of her father, and briefly talks about her subsequent marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_004, TRT: 0:29:14
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Dr. Petioni talks about her introvertedness and her small circle of friends and family in Harlem. She then describes her marriage, her move to Chicago and her 5-year hiatus from the medical field. Dr. Petioni describes her father's handling of her return to Harlem to continue practicing medicine. She then recalls the deaths of her siblings and her father. Lastly, Dr. Petioni details the establishment of her medical career on its own merits.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_005, TRT: 0:29:37
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Dr. Muriel Petioni recounts her father's accolades as a businessman and political activist. She then details her efforts to organize black female physicians. Dr. Petioni then discusses her activities with the Coalition of 100 Black Women. Lastly, she reflects on her lengthy medical career.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_006, TRT: 0:30:01
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Dr. Muriel Petioni recalls her support network and the comments on the way

Caribbean women are raised and nurtured career-wise. She then talks about the West Indian and professional organizations she is involved in. Dr. Petioni then discusses her plans for the future. Lastly, Dr. Petioni comments on the historical significance of Harlem Hospital Center to the black community in the past and in the present day.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Muriel Petioni, Section A2001_056_001_007, TRT: 0:29:26
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Dr. Muriel Petioni contemplates what her legacy might be and whether she would continue to encourage blacks to enter the medical profession.