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UA00183

The Percy A. Pierre Presidential Papers Collection

Created by Anna Gaffey, May 2013

Revised by Evelyn Davis, April 2024

The Percy A. Pierre Presidential Papers Collection Finding aid

Collection Overview

Creator: Percy A. Pierre

Title: The Presidents and Principals Papers: Percy A. Pierre, 1983-1989

Dates: 1982-1989

Quantity: 0.25 Linear Feet (6 folders)

Abstract: The Percy A. Pierre Papers include biographical materials, correspondence, news clippings, photographs, printed materials, and writings relating to the tenure of the fourth president of Prairie View A & M University.

Identification: UA00183

Use Restrictions: Written permission must be obtained from the Special Collections/Archives Department and all relevant rights holders before publishing quotations, excerpts, or images from any materials in this collection.

Language: The materials are in English.

Repository: Prairie View A&M University

Biographical Note: Dr. Percy Anthony Pierre (born January 3, 1939) is an African-American electrical engineer, educator and administrator who served as the fourth president of Prairie View A & M University. His career has included stints as a researcher, a White House fellow, an engineering consultant, and various administrative positions in government and higher education. Currently he serves as Vice President Emeritus and Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Michigan State University.

Percy A. Pierre was born in St. James Parish, Louisiana, to Rosa Villavaso Pierre and Percy John Pierre. After graduating from St. Augustine High School in New Orleans, Pierre enrolled in Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. As a student Pierre helped organize the first and only civil rights march in South Bend, and participated in efforts to integrate bars and restaurants in the city. In 1961 he attended University of Norte Dame, and obtained BS and MS degrees in electrical engineering. In 1965 Pierre married Olga A. Markham and had two children; Kristin Clare and Allison Celeste. In 1967 he received his PhD in electrical engineering at John Hopkins University; he is recognized as the first African-American to earn a doctorate in the field.

In 1968 Pierre attended University of Michigan for post-doctoral studies before moving to Santa Monica, California, to take on a research position in the communications division of The Rand Corporation. The following year he was appointed a White House Fellow for the Office of the President of the United States, then returned to Rand for an additional year. During this period he also published several important academic papers on signal processing and detection.

In 1971 Pierre accepted the position of dean of the school of engineering at Howard University, one of the nation's most prestigious historically black colleges. At Howard he quickly became involved in various programs to increase minority participation in engineering. Working with General Electric, the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) and the group Minority Engineering Education Effort, Pierre proposed and co-chaired a symposium on the subject. The symposium, held in the summer of 1973, resulted in the creation of the NAE's National Advisory Committee on Minorities in Engineering (later changed to National Advisory Council on Minorities in Engineering after breaking off from the NAE). Thirty years later NACME stood as the nation's largest private source of scholarships for minority engineering students. Pierre credited this success to working with the private sector, particularly companies such as GE, Exxon, and Boeing who would benefit from an increased engineering talent pool. Following the symposium, Pierre was chosen as the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's program officer, and helped institute several enduring programs while maintaining his deanship at Howard. They included the National Scholarship Fund for Minority Engineering Students, developed with Sloan and NACME, and the National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science.

In 1977 Pierre left the world of academia and became an assistant secretary for research, development, and acquisition in the US Department of the Army. He managed nearly \$10 billion annually for the research, development, and production of weapons systems including smart weapons, radar systems, and secure communications. During the first Gulf war, Pierre was credited with the success of the Patriot Missile's capabilities. In 1979 he authored "Equipping the Army," a congressional report that was cited for an Award of Merit by Senator Proxmire, who called the report one of the most readable and honest presentations that he had seen in his many years in government.

In 1981 Pierre left the military sector to open a private engineering consultancy firm. Upon his resignation he received the distinguished civilian service award from the army. His Bethesda, Maryland-based firm, Percy A. Pierre Associates, assisted Morgan State University, Florida A & M, and Xavier University with their respective engineering programs, and consulted with the Washington D.C. and the Baton Rouge public school systems on the creation of engineering high schools.

Pierre returned to academia in 1983 as the fourth president at Prairie View A & M University, a historically black university located in Prairie View, Texas. Overseeing a

budget of \$65 million, 950 employees, and nearly 6,000 students, Pierre led the school in major reforms including the construction of nine new buildings and the renovation of seven more. He established the College of Engineering Technology as well as an honors program. New educational directions were taken in the pursuit of academic excellence through the establishment of the new Roy G. Perry College of Engineering Technology and the Benjamin Banneker Honors College. The Benjamin Banneker Honors College provided honors level programs, and was later replaced by the University Scholars program. The Roy G. Perry College of Engineering Technology developed out of the old College of Industrial Education through the elimination of most vocational and industrial technology programs; the upgrading of existing programs; and the introduction of three new programs in computer engineering technology and electrical and mechanical engineering technology. Beginning September 1987, the university merged the colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics with the Roy G. Perry College of Engineering Technology and renamed them the College of Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology. The colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics became departments in the new college, while the Computer Science program transferred from the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science to the Department of Engineering Technology.

The physical development of the campus proceeded according to the Master Plan of August 1984, which sought to enhance the historic part of the campus through new building construction, renovations, and exterior construction and landscaping. Among new buildings constructed were the five-story John B. Coleman Library, the Agricultural Research Building, the Chemical Engineering Laboratory Building, the Education and Classroom Building, the Engineering Technology Building, the Johnson-Phillip All Faiths Chapel, the Central Receiving and Warehouse buildings, the new Gymnasium, and the Intramural Athletic Complex. Buildings renovated include the Field House, the Home Economics Building, the Harrington Science Building, the President's House, the Physical Plant Building, the Power Plant, and the Gilchrist Engineering Building. Exterior construction converted the campus to a pedestrian campus with the construction of several major malls and broad walkways between them. By the time he left the post in 1989, enrollment had increased by 25 percent and the school's endowment had swelled from \$300,000 to over \$3 million. In 2013, Percy Pierre passed away due to unknown causes.

Sources: None.

Scope and Contents Note: The Percy A. Pierre Papers consist of biographical material, correspondence, news clippings, photographs, printed materials, and writings by and relating to Dr. Pierre and his tenure as President of Prairie View A & M University. **Biographical material** consists of biographical sketches, vitae and career summaries, and articles.

Correspondence consists of two letters and one memo, all incoming. **News Clippings** are made up of photocopied articles and one magazine about Dr. Pierre, his various positions, and his tenure at Prairie View A & M University. **Photographs** consist of two photographs

of Dr. Pierre accepting an award. **Printed materials** include various printed materials, and **Writings** consist of published and unpublished material written by Dr. Pierre, including commencement addresses and an article.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by series of Correspondence, News Clippings, and Printed Materials are all arranged chronologically. Writings are divided into published and unpublished subseries and are arranged alphabetically by title. Biographical material and photographs are not arranged.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

The Percy A. Pierre Presidential Papers Collection, UA00183, Special Collections/Archives Department, John B. Coleman Library, Prairie View A&M University

Related Material: The PVAMU Principals and Presidents Collection.

The George R. Woolfolk Collection. Black Studies Journals.

Index Terms

African American educators.

Educators – United States.

Employees – Administrators.

Pierre, Percy A, 1925-2013.

Prairie View Normal and Industrial College (Prairie View, TX)

Prairie View (TX).

Inventor

Box #	Folder #	Title/Description	Date	Location
Series 1: Biographical material, 2013, undated				
1	1	Biography (unknown publication)	Undated	R2/C2/R5
1	1	Biography of Dr. Percy A. Pierre	Undated	R2/C2/R5
1	1	Resume	Undated	R2/C2/R5
1	1	Forward times newspaper article	10/2013	R2/C2/R5
1	2	Photographs	Undated	R2/C2/R5
2	n/a	Scrapbook	Undated	R1/C3/R4
Series Two: Correspondence, 1984-1987				
1	3	Memo to members of the Presidential Investiture Committee	04/1984	R2/C2/R5

1	3	Letter from National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. (NACME)	07/1984	R2/C2/R5
1	3	Letter from Black Issues in Higher Education	09/1987	R2/C2/R5
Series Three: News Clippings, 1982-1989				
1	4	Miscellaneous Newspaper Clippings	1982-1989	R2/C2/R5
Series Four: Printed Material, undated				
1	5	Invitation from Mrs. Percy A. Pierre	Undated	R2/C2/R5
1	5	Flyer advertisement	Undated	R2/C2/R5
1	5	Founder's Day program	Undated	R2/C2/R5
Series Five: Writings, 1986-1989				
1	6	Commencement address (13 Dec 1986)	1986	R2/C2/R5
1	6	Commencement address (14 May 1989)	1989	R2/C2/R5
1	6	Statement to NAFEO (11 Apr 1986)	1986	R2/C2/R5
1	6	Time to take stock (17 Aug 1986)	1986	R2/C2/R5
1	6	Combatting minority brain drain, <i>Institutional Strategies</i> , Spring 1987	1987	R2/C2/R5