

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Michael Powell

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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>	Powell, Michael Kevin, 1963-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 2, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:40:53).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Telecommunications lawyer and federal government appointee The Honorable Michael Powell (1963 - ) is the former commissioner and chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Powell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 2, 2006, in McLean, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_010
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The Honorable Michael Kevin Powell was born on March 23, 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, the only son and eldest child of General Colin Powell and Alma Vivian Johnson Powell. Powell's father was serving in Vietnam when Powell was born. He attended the College of William and Mary thanks to an ROTC scholarship, and graduated in 1985 with a degree in government. While attending William and Mary, Powell dated Jane Knott, who he would later marry. After college, he served in the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Amberg, Germany as a cavalry patrol officer. In 1987, while traveling in a convoy on the Autobahn in Germany, Powell's jeep crashed and severely injured his pelvis and spine. After being stabilized in Nuremburg's U.S. Army hospital, Powell spent one year recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

This injury curtailed his military career, and Powell returned to civilian work with two years as a policy advisor to the U.S. Defense Secretary, Richard Cheney. He then decided to go to law school, attending Georgetown University's Law Center, where he graduated from in 1993 with a J.D. degree. He initially worked as a clerk in Washington, D.C.'s U.S. Court of Appeals for the Honorable Harry T. Edwards. He was then hired in 1994 as an associate in the Washington, D.C. office for the Los Angeles based law firm O'Melveny & Myers until 1996. While working at O'Melveny & Myers, Powell specialized in telecommunications and antitrust law. The following year, Powell became the chief of staff for the U.S. Justice Department's Antitrust Division, advising the Assistant Attorney General on criminal investigations, policy development, and mergers.

On July 31, 1997, President William Jefferson Clinton appointed Powell to serve as a commissioner for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and in 2001, President George W. Bush appointed him Chairman of the FCC, the second African American to hold the position. As Chairman, Powell intended to modernize FCC regulations and emphasize the importance of the shift from analog to digital technologies. He also encouraged market-driven solutions to promote consumer interest, which involved a general deregulation of the marketplace; Powell's philosophy highlighted the idea that regulation limits consumer choice. Powell's well-known

accomplishments were the establishment of a “Do-Not-Call” list to avoid telemarketers and forcing wireless carriers to allow consumers to maintain their phone numbers even when switching services. Powell was also responsible for overseeing the Commission’s National Security Emergency Preparedness utility. Powell left the FCC in 2005.

Powell is Senior Advisor with Providence Equity Partners and Chairman of the MK Powell Group. He is Rector of the College of William and Mary. Powell is also an Aspen trustee and serves on the Rand Corporation Board.

Powell lives in Fairfax Station, Virginia with his wife, Jane Knott Powell, and their sons, Jeffrey and Bryan.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Michael Powell was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on February 2, 2006, in McLean, Virginia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Telecommunications lawyer and federal government appointee The Honorable Michael Powell (1963 - ) is the former commissioner and chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

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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:

Powell, Michael Kevin, 1963-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Powell, Michael Kevin, 1963---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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United States. Federal Communications Commission

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**Occupations:**

Telecommunications Lawyer

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Federal Government Appointee

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Michael Powell, February 2, 2006. 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.

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell was born on March 23, 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama to Alma Powell and General Colin L. Powell. His maternal grandfather, Robert Johnson, was the principal of Birmingham's A.H. Parker High School, and his maternal grandmother, Mildred Bell Johnson, was an advocate for African American girls. Powell's paternal grandparents, Maud McKoy Powell and Luther Powell, immigrated to New York from Jamaica. They were unhappy about his parents' marriage, and were reluctant to travel to Birmingham for the wedding. In his youth, Powell's father was immature until he joined the U.S. Army. As a military family, the Powells moved frequently, and Powell did not visit his grandparents often. Nevertheless, he completed the first through seventh grades in Dale City, Virginia. As his father was overseas during most of his childhood, Powell's mother deeply influenced his childhood and personality. He remembers moving days, playing in the woods and his favorite musicals, including 'The Wiz' and 'Purlie.'

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell and his two younger sisters, Linda Powell and Annemarie Powell Lyons, were raised in suburban homes, where their parents hosted parties. Powell attended Bel Air Elementary School and Mills E. Godwin Middle School in Dale City, Virginia. While the school was integrated with an abundance of African American students, Powell often felt isolated from his peers due to his father's rank. He enjoyed his experience as a Cub Scout and a Webelos, but left his troop just before being promoted to a Boy Scout, because he was afraid of having to place the uniform's red beret over his afro. Growing up in a military household, Powell felt a heightened sense of responsibility, decorum and duty, and his father stressed the importance of mutual respect among those serving, regardless of rank. He remembers the day his father became a general, and its importance to his family. Powell attended the pinning ceremony for his father in the E-ring of The Pentagon.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell attended Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke, Virginia, where he was captain of the gymnastic team, and also served as a director and lighting assistant in the theater department. In this capacity, he was mentored by theater teacher, V.C. Pat Jones. Powell recalls major political events such as the Watergate Scandal, the Apollo 11 landing and the presidential elections. He went on to major in government at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. There, he met his future wife, Jane Knott Powell, whom he dated for two years before they decided to see other people. In college, Powell pledged Theta Delta Chi Fraternity, and was a member of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. He graduated as a second lieutenant, and received further training at Fort Knox to become a first lieutenant. Then, Powell was sent to Germany, where he sustained severe injuries in a car accident. He returned to the United States, and was hospitalized in Washington,

D.C. for one year.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:29:50 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell underwent extensive surgery to repair his broken spine and pelvis following a car accident in Germany. He learned to walk again through physical therapy; and four months after his release, he married Jane Knott Powell. With his U.S. Army career ended, he decided to pursue a legal career. He worked in The Pentagon for Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage for two years before enrolling at Georgetown University Law Center. In his first year, he won a moot court competition, and joined the premier court team. During the summer, he worked for the Washington, D.C. law firm O'Melveny and Myers LLP. After graduation, Powell was selected as an appellate court clerk under Harry T. Edwards. For a 1994 bus accident case, Powell wrote the dissenting opinion on Edwards' behalf, and the original verdict was overturned. Powell returned to O'Melveny and Myers LLP under the tutelage of William T. Coleman, Jr., where he met U.S. Supreme Court Judge Thurgood Marshall.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:30:30 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell began to focus his legal practice on antitrust and communication law in his third year at O'Melveny and Myers LLP. His clients included the Walt Disney Company and GTE Corporation, which was the predecessor of Verizon Communications. Powell became chief of staff for the antitrust division of the U.S. Justice Department under Joel Klein, who mentored him at Georgetown University Law Center. One of the high profile cases from his time there was the 2001 United States v. Microsoft Corporation antitrust law case. Powell was appointed to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) by President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton and President George Walker Bush. He first served on the FCC under William E. Kennard, the first African American chairman. Powell reflects upon the issues faced by Kennard's administration, and the equal employment opportunity rules that he proposed. He also reflects upon the career of Thurgood Marshall and his mentor William T. Coleman, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_006,  
TRT: 0:31:07 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell served as a commissioner to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for three and a half years before he was appointed chairman. In this position, he developed his own management style that differed from the tactics of his predecessors. Powell also learned that, while each of the five commissioners vote on each matter, the chairman is often portrayed as the sole agent for the FCC. As chairman, Powell faced criticism in the media regarding his proposed increase of the 35 percent rule to allow companies to control up to 45 percent of a market. Powell talks about the major issues with the rule; various organizations' positions on federal regulation; and how alliances are formed between groups that were typically opposed, such as the National Rifle Association and Moveon.org. After two years, the U.S. Congress increased the ownership rights regulations to 39 percent. Powell also created the FCC University to train FCC staff on emerging technology.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_007,  
TRT: 0:27:26 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell reflects upon the changes in broadcast media from the 1990s to the early 2000s. Communications technology advanced

rapidly with innovations such as iTunes, TiVo and Voice over Internet Protocol. This period also saw changes in broadcast control and production amidst the federal mandate to switch from analog to high-definition television. Powell talks about the evolution of computer technology, with newer, faster models being less expensive than their predecessors. He argues that wireless internet technology and changes in the broadcast industry have altered the dynamics of watching television, and expresses his concern that the proliferation of media eliminates shared experiences between individuals. Powell reflects upon his political career and ideology, which he describes as moderate; and his father, Gen. Colin L. Powell's political stance in comparison his own.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Michael Powell, Section A2006\_010\_001\_008, TRT: 0:10:30 ?

The Honorable Michael Powell reflects upon the impact of race and the African American men who influenced him within the U.S. Justice Department. He describes his work to help the next generation of African American attorneys and professionals through meetings, advising, and building networks. Powell concludes his interview by reflecting upon his legacy.