

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Eric Werner

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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>	Werner, Eric, 1944-2011
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 15, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer Eric Werner (1944 - 2011 ) was the founder of the Picture This Camera Club student photography workshop and was appointed to the Jazz Unites Board of Directors and the Chicago Cultural Center Community Grants Board. Werner was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_006
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Distinguished photographer Eric Werner began his career in the 1970s after returning from Vietnam. He participated in a community film workshop between 1970 and 1973 and received his A.A. in 1977 from Olive-Harvey College. Between 1979 and 1980, Werner attended Governors State University and earned his B.A. and some credits toward his master's degree. He was also inspired by a Friends of Photography Ansel Adams Advanced Photographic Workshop he attended in 1979.

From 1971 to 1977, Werner worked at a school photography company, Art Color Photographers, after which he directed and headed a multimedia production company, Centric Media Productions, for two years. Between June 1981 and November 1983, Werner worked as a staff photographer for Andrew Corporation. Then in 1984, he launched his career as a freelance photographer servicing corporate, private and nonprofit clients. His work has been displayed in numerous individual and group shows and is featured in various public and private collections, such as those of Michael Jordan, Gwendolyn Brooks, the Chicago Urban League and Allstate Insurance Company. Werner's photography has been published in many magazines and newspapers and his client list includes many high-profile companies and organizations, such as Proctor & Gamble, the Salvation Army, Quaker Oats Company, United Way, Coca-Cola USA., Coors and Citibank.

Werner has been honored with various awards for his work in numerous art and film festivals and photography contests. In 1990, he began volunteering as a photography instructor for the Chicago Park District. He founded the Picture This Camera Club to teach students the technical aspect of photography as an art form. He has also been appointed to the Jazz Unites Board of Directors and the Chicago Cultural Center Community Grants Board.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Eric Werner was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 15, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Eric Werner (1944 - 2011 ) was the founder of the Picture This Camera Club student photography workshop and was appointed to the Jazz Unites Board of Directors and the Chicago Cultural Center Community Grants Board.

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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:

Werner, Eric, 1944-2011

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Werner, Eric, 1944-2011--Interviews

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African American photographers--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

# Occupations:

Photographer

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Eric Werner, January 15, 2003. 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 Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_001\_001, TRT: 0:25:50 ?

Eric Werner was born on August 9, 1944, in Riverside, California to Gwendolyn Blakely and Joseph Werner. His great-grandparents Daniel and Ella Nelson were from Louisiana. Daniel Nelson was a professor at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. The Nelson's son, Delson Nelson was a musician who toured with Ma Rainey. Werner's father was born in New Orleans, but his family migrated to Chicago, Illinois when he was a boy. In Chicago, Werner's father pursued a musical career before starting a small trucking firm. Werner's mother was a creative woman who worked as a caterer, dressmaker, and

milliner. Werner describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood in Chicago's West Chesterfield neighborhood. He had a middleclass upbringing and attended integrated schools: Burnside Elementary School and Harlan High School. Werner's artistic talent was recognized early on when he won a scholarship to a program for young artists at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Werner attended Loop College before he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967. He describes his training at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri in preparation for the Vietnam War.

African American children--Illinois--Chicago.

African American families--Louisiana.

African American high school students--Illinois--Chicago.

Draft--United States--1960-1970.

African American soldiers--Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

African American social life and custom--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Eric Werner was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1967 during the Vietnam War. After enduring basic training at Fort Leonard Wood with a broken elbow, Werner aggravated his injury to evade deployment. The Army operated on his arm and sent him into Tuy Hoa Air Base in Vietnam with limited function of his right arm. He was awarded an Army Commendation Medal for coordinating supply trucks for the 577th Engineering Battalion on the QL-1 highway. While Werner was in Vietnam, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. He recalls racial discrimination in the Army, hearing Rev. Dr. King speak in Chicago, Illinois as a teenager, and the shift in public sentiment towards Rev. Dr. King after his death. Werner's military service made him realize that he wanted to dedicate his life to the arts. After returning to the States in 1968, he focused on photography and film, and started Art Color Photographers. Werner's interest in lighting led him to James "Jim" Taylor at the Community Film Workshop, a federally funded program designed to increase the number of minorities in cinema by providing access to expensive tools required for film production.

African American soldiers--Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968--Political and social views.

Elbow--wounds and injuries--Complications.

Photography--study and teaching.

Tet Offensive, 1968--Personal narratives, American.

United States. Army Medals, badges, decorations, etc.

Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Eric Werner studied film with James Taylor at the Community Film Workshop before enrolling at Governors State University in University Park, Illinois. At Governors State, Werner learned from iconic photographers like Ansel Adams, Morley Baer, and Minor White. He graduated in 1979. As a young boy, Werner was influenced by HistoryMaker Gordon Parks' color series on the ghettos of Brazil and street gangs in Harlem, New York. Although Werner appreciated the artistry of photos taken by Parks and other respected photographers like John Tweedle, he believed many early black photographers lacked technical expertise. Over the years, Werner took photographs of politicians and celebrities like President Bill Clinton, Stevie Wonder, and HistoryMaker Minister Louis Farrakhan. He also took photographs for HistoryMaker Dorothy Height's black family reunion project. In 1991, Werner started teaching a photography class

through the Chicago Park District and mentored his sister, Toya Werner Martin's, success as a photographer. Werner talks about his camera equipment and tabloid assignments for the Globe and the Inquirer.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006

Height, Dorothy I. (Dorothy Irene), 1912-2010.

Governors State University.

Photography--study and teaching.

Photography--Technique.

Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Eric Werner comments on the obstacles facing black photographers as well as factors which prevent photographers from entering commercial photography. These obstacles include the high level of financial investment, smaller networks, and the difficulty of competing with majority photographers. Pioneers in black photography including James Van Der Zee, the Smith Brothers, and Roy DeCarava faced difficulties that continue to persist. Nonetheless, Werner offers his advice for aspiring photographers. He also talks about black advertising agencies in Chicago, Illinois including Burrell Advertising and Proctor & Gardner. Werner reflects upon his legacy and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. His parents lived to see him succeed in the arts and were proud of his accomplishments as a photographer. Werner also narrates his photographs.

DeCarava, Roy.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago.

Van Der Zee, James, 1886-1983

Photography--Vocational guidance.

Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_001\_005, TRT: 0:04:45 ?

Eric Werner continues to narrate his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Eric Werner, Section A2003\_006\_Werner\_Eric\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: