

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnathan Rodgers

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Rodgers, Johnathan, 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers,
Dates:	October 13, 2004 and September 24, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:43:55).
Abstract:	Television executive Johnathan Rodgers (1946 -) is the former editor of urban affairs for Newsweek magazine and worked as a general assignment reporter for WKYC-TV in Cleveland, Ohio. Rodgers also served as the news director, general manager, and executive producer for CBS News, and the president of the network's television station division. Rodgers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 13, 2004 and September 24, 2004, in Silver Spring, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_179
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Johnathan Arlin Rodgers was born on January 18, 1946 in San Antonio, Texas. His mother was a homemaker and his father was a soldier in the United States Air Force. As a “military brat,” Rodgers lived in a number of countries and states. He graduated from Rantoul High School in Rantoul, Illinois in 1963. While at Rantoul, he worked on the school paper and was a member of the wrestling team.

In 1967, Rodgers received his bachelor's of arts degree in journalistic studies from the University of California - Berkeley. While studying at Berkeley, he was sports editor of the campus newspaper, a member of the football team and pledged to the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

From 1967 until 1968, Rodgers worked at *Sports Illustrated Magazine*. He was the first African American journalist hired by the publication. His beat included track and field and college basketball. His article, “The Plight of the Black Athlete,” highlighted the struggles African American athletes encountered in both the college and professional arenas. From 1968 until 1969, Rodgers served as the editor of urban affairs for *Newsweek Magazine*.

In 1969, Rodgers was drafted in the United States Army and served at Fort Jackson, South Carolina until 1971. In 1973, he earned his master's degree in communications from Stanford University, and then worked as a writer / producer for WNBC in New York. In 1974, Rodgers was hired as a general assignment reporter for WKYC-TV in Cleveland, Ohio, and the following year he transitioned from on-air personality to management when he accepted the assistant news director's position at WBBM-TV in Chicago. This began a successful career at CBS, where he would serve as news director, general manager, executive producer for CBS News and the president of the network's television station division. In 1998, Rodgers left CBS and was hired by Discovery Networks. During his six years at Discovery, the network increased viewers by the millions and added nearly a dozen new stations. His

responsibilities included all aspects of domestic television, programming, affiliate sales, advertising sales, marketing, research, development and communications.

In 2003, Rodgers was hired as the chief executive officer of TV-One, an entertainment and lifestyle cable television network targeting African American viewers. It is owned by Radio One and Comcast Cable.

Rodgers was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 24, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Johnathan Rodgers was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on October 13, 2004 and September 24, 2004, in Silver Spring, Maryland, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television executive Johnathan Rodgers (1946 -) is the former editor of urban affairs for Newsweek magazine and worked as a general assignment reporter for WKYC-TV in Cleveland, Ohio. Rodgers also served as the news director, general manager, and executive producer for CBS News, and the president of the network's television station division.

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:

Rodgers, Johnathan, 1946-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Rodgers, Johnathan, 1946---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Television Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Johnathan Rodgers, October 13, 2004 and September 24, 2004. 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 Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_001_001, TRT: 0:30:36
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Johnathan Rodgers was born January 18, 1946 in San Antonio, Texas. His maternal grandmother was a Seventh-day Adventist and strict disciplinarian who moved with Rodgers' family from Texas to California. His mother, Barbara Merriwether Rodgers, was born in 1922 in Lubbock, Texas where she was raised in a large family. Although she was unable to attend college immediately after high school, in the 1950s she graduated from San Francisco State College in California. His paternal grandparents were cotton pickers from Elmo, Texas. His father, Marion Rodgers, joined the U.S. Air Force shortly after its desegregation. In the military, he attended college, graduated with a master's degree, became a lieutenant colonel and worked administratively with the Tuskegee Airmen. Rodgers' mother enrolled him in a Catholic school when he was three years old. In Oakland, California, Rodgers reluctantly joined the Boy Scouts. He considers the significance of Juneteenth celebrations and the importance of food at family holidays.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_001_002, TRT: 0:29:23
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Johnathan Rodgers' family moved from Texas to Japan for his father's U.S. military appointment during the Korean War; witnessing the effects of war and living in a foreign country broadened his understanding of the world. While attending Brookfield Elementary School in Oakland, California, he aspired to become a journalist. Rodgers was in an all-black Boy Scout troop that participated in talent shows to affirm their racial pride during the integration of Little Rock, Arkansas. Attending Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Oakland with his mother and siblings helped develop his sense of social values. In 1958, his family returned to Japan where he attended a multicultural, U.S. military junior high school on Okinawa Island. As he matured, Rodgers became more bashful and sometimes felt excluded as one of only a few African American students. This led to him placing a greater emphasis on academic achievement than socialization. While attending high school in Rantoul, Illinois, he began to excel academically.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_001_003, TRT: 0:30:27
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Johnathan Rodgers attended Rantoul Township High School in Rantoul, Illinois where his teacher, Mary C. Greenwood, mentored him in journalism. Rodgers traveled often to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois on account of its larger African American population. A high school counselor discouraged him from applying to Ivy League schools, so Rodgers chose to attend the University of California, Berkeley. While there, Rodgers participated in the Free Speech Movement and the Daily Californian, the student newspaper, which solidified his interest in journalism. He also began to consider leadership roles within news organizations to undermine the assumption that he should not aim for such an advanced position. Rodgers was a member of the Black Student Union and participated in the boycott of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech on campus to question the goal of integration. He shares his perspective on the Civil Rights Movement, including its impact for American society generally and African Americans specifically.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_001_004, TRT: 0:30:27
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Johnathan Rodgers joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at the University of California, Berkeley and spoke to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. about his opposition to integration in light of the Vietnam War. Rodgers interned for Time Inc. in New York, New York. After completing his B.A. in 1967, he joined Sports Illustrated as a full-time sports editor. Focusing on the marginalization of African American athletes, Rodgers wrote the series 'The Plight of the Black Athlete.' When his interest in sports journalism waned, Rodgers became editor of urban affairs for Newsweek, contributing to its coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention and assassination of Dr. King during the time when women on staff sued the magazine for discrimination. Upon being drafted by the U.S. Army in 1969, he refused to sign the Oath of Allegiance. The army was reluctant to deploy him to Vietnam, so he opened a bookstore with friends in Columbia, South Carolina before being sent to Korea to coach the Army's basketball team.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_001_005, TRT: 0:29:20
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Johnathan Rodgers left the U.S. military after eighteen months to attend Stanford University's graduate film school in Stanford, California and pursue a career in television management. He returned to New York, New York to write for NBC News, where he advanced to producer. In the early 1970s, he was offered a job as a news reporter for WKYC in Cleveland, Ohio where he met his wife, Royal Kennedy, whom he proposed to on TV. Rodgers followed his wife to Chicago, Illinois and eventually was hired as assistant news director at WBBM-TV. Rodgers promoted more accurate representations of African Americans by offering positive and balanced representations on the news. In 1978, he moved to Los Angeles, California to become executive producer for KCBS-TV's evening news broadcast. Rodgers considers the importance of his membership in the National Association of Black Journalists and the impact of ratings for television news.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_002_006, TRT: 0:29:40
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Johnathan Rodgers was executive producer for Los Angeles' KCBS-TV long-form evening newscast. He was promoted to news director then station manager. He returned to New York, New York where he became executive producer of CBS's first overnight newscast, 'Night Watch,' before producing CBS's weekend and morning news. In the mid-1980s, HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and Operation PUSH protested CBS's WBBM-TV in Chicago, Illinois. In response to the protests, Rodgers became the station's general manager and was responsible for licensing, news, hiring and programming. He was promoted to president of CBS Television Stations, assuming responsibility for CBS stations nationwide. When CBS was sold to Westinghouse Electric Corporation in 1996, Rodgers retired. However, he left retirement after ninety days to become president of Discovery Networks U.S. in Washington, D.C. Rodgers explains the purview of owned and operated television stations and the responsibilities of a station's general manager.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_002_007, TRT: 0:31:02
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Johnathan Rodgers was president of Discovery Networks U.S. for six years. During this time, the company launched successful cable channels such as Animal Planet, The Learning Channel (TLC) and Travel Channel. After his

second retirement, Rodgers collaborated with HistoryMaker Alfred Liggins III to form TV One, a cable channel targeted to African American adults. Rodgers' vision for TV One was to create a channel focusing solely on content for African Americans that was not featured on other stations. TV One developed original programming that diverged from Black Entertainment Television's emphasis on music videos. TV One produced the dating show 'Get the Hook Up' and 'Living It Up with Patti Labelle' along with reruns of popular shows such as 'Good Times.' Rodgers describes TV One's distribution goals and his perspective on African American TV viewership. He also reflects upon the success of TLC programming and his life.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnathan Rodgers, Section A2004_179_002_008, TRT: 0:13:00
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Johnathan Rodgers moved to Chicago, Illinois to follow his wife, Royal Kennedy, who had accepted a position as a news reporter at NBC's WMAQ-TV. Rodgers later became the news director of a rival station, CBS's WBBM-TV. Despite the conflict, they maintained a friendly competition and loving relationship. When the couple moved to Los Angeles, California, Kennedy and Rodgers successfully juggled work responsibilities and parenthood. Rodgers shares advice for prospective television managers and reporters as well as his perspective on the future of television programming. He describes his concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. The tape ends with Rodgers' thoughts on the importance of African American involvement in television management to engage and shape the discourse about important political topics.