

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Eugene Rivers

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Rivers, Eugene
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers,
Dates:	February 12, 2007 and February 13, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:59:21).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive and pastor Reverend Eugene Rivers (1950 -) was the founder of Azusa Christian Community, and the president of the National Ten Point Leadership Foundation. Rivers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 12, 2007 and February 13, 2007, in Dorchester, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_063
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Youth activist Reverend Eugene Franklin Rivers, III was born on April 9, 1950, in Boston, Massachusetts. Rivers spent his early years in Chicago where his parents, Mildred Bell Rivers and Eugene F. Rivers, Jr. were members of the Nation of Islam. Rivers's father, as Eugene 3X, designed the masthead for *Muhammad Speaks*. Rivers attended Edmund Elementary School and McCosh Elementary School in Chicago. After his parents divorced, Rivers attended Joseph Parnell Elementary and Wagner Junior High School. Mentored by Reverend Benjamin Smith of Philadelphia's Deliverance Evangelistic Temple, Rivers graduated from Dobbins Vocational High School in 1968. Rivers then studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, while he became active in street level organizing and black church politics. In 1970, Rivers was a part of the Black Economic Development Conference working with Muhammad Kenyatta; he later joined Lucius Walker and James Forman in the Reparations Movement. Rivers attended Yale as an unregistered activist from 1973 to 1976. Officially admitted to Harvard University in 1976, Rivers was mentored by Dr. Martin Kilsonl. Rivers met his wife, Jacqueline, at Harvard University.

Recognized as one of the most effective crusaders against gang violence, Rivers founded Azusa Christian Community in 1984 in the Four Corners section of Boston's inner city Dorchester neighborhood. As President of the National Ten Point Leadership Foundation, he worked to build new grassroots leadership in forty of the worst inner city neighborhoods in inner city America. Rivers served as president of the Ella J. Baker House, the separate 501 (c)(3) non-profit originally created by the Azusa Christian Community.

Rivers has appeared on CNN's *Hardball*, NBC's *Meet the Press*, PBS's *Charlie Rose*, BET's *Lead Story*, and National Public Radio, among other programs. Rivers was featured or provided commentary for publications such as *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Boston Globe*, as well as periodicals such as the *Boston Review*, *Sojourners*, *Christianity Today*, and *Books and Culture*. Rivers authored or co-authored numerous essays, including *On the Responsibility of*

Intellectuals in an Age of Crack, Beyond the Nationalism of Fools: A Manifesto for a New Black Movement, Black Churches and the Challenge of U.S. Foreign and Development Policy (2001), *An Open Letter to the U.S. Black Religious, Intellectual, and Political Leadership Regarding AIDS and the Sexual Holocaust in Africa* (1999), and *A Pastoral Letter to President George W. Bush on Bridging our Racial Divide* (2001). In addition to television and print appearances, Rivers lectured at universities, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Calvin College.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 12, 2007 and February 13, 2007, in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive and pastor Reverend Eugene Rivers (1950 -) was the founder of Azusa Christian Community, and the president of the National Ten Point Leadership Foundation.

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:

Rivers, Eugene

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Rivers, Eugene--Interviews

African American civic leaders--Interviews

Community activists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Tenant Participation Training Initiative

Occupations:

Pastor

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|ReligionMakers

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 Reverend Eugene Rivers, February 12, 2007 and February 13, 2007. 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 Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers was born on April 9, 1950 in Boston, Massachusetts to Mildred Bell Rivers and Eugene Rivers, Jr. His paternal great-grandfather, Mose Rivers, was born a slave. He became a contractor, and built Silver Hill Methodist Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina. There, his paternal grandfather, Eugene Rivers, Sr., became the principal of Carver High School, after earning a bachelor's degree from the Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina in Orangeburg, and a master's degree from the University of Michigan. Rivers' maternal grandparents, Bertha Bell and Judge Paris Bell, Sr., raised their family in Walterboro, South Carolina. His parents met at the Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina, where his mother studied nursing. Both his parents served in the U.S. military during World War II. They married in 1948, and moved to Boston, Massachusetts, where his father attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Community activists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_001_002, TRT: 0:30:16 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers' family moved from Boston, Massachusetts to Chicago, Illinois, where his father took a position as an illustrator for the Chicago Crusader, and his mother worked as a registered nurse at Provident Hospital and Michael Reese Hospital. Shortly after their relocation to Chicago in 1953, Rivers' parents divorced. In Chicago, Rivers lived with his mother in the neighborhood of Woodlawn, where he resided in the Parkway Garden Homes at South Parkway and 63rd Street, and attended Edmund Burke Elementary School, and later James McCosh Elementary School. In 1957, Rivers' father joined the Nation of Islam, and took the name Eugene Majied. He was recruited by Malcolm X as the chief illustrator and art director of Muhammad Speaks newspaper. In 1959, Rivers moved with his mother to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he enrolled at Joseph Pennell Elementary School. Rivers describes his early experiences in the neighborhoods of Chicago and Philadelphia, as well as his parents' personalities.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_001_003, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at nine years old with his mother, who encouraged his artistic and intellectual pursuits. He read the works of author Chester Himes and historian Harry Elmer Barnes, and listened to Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker albums. He also attended the Josh Pennell Elementary School, and boxed at the Police Athletic League of Philadelphia after school. Rivers later attended General Louis Wagner Junior High School, where he was forced to join a street gang. To initiate his membership, Rivers was pressured to shoot a neighbor, but refused. He went on

to attend Murrell Dobbins Vocational High School, where he was inspired to study commercial art by his father's career as an illustrator. He was steered away from gang activity by his pastor, Benjamin Smith, Sr., who mentored Rivers, and encouraged his involvement in Philadelphia's Deliverance Evangelistic Church. Rivers also recalls Jeremiah Shabazz, and the influence of the Nation of Islam in Philadelphia.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_001_004, TRT: 0:29:06 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers graduated from Murrell Dobbins Vocational High School in 1968, and then studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. He frequented art galleries, where he met other local African American artists like Clifford Eubanks and Barkley L. Hendricks. By 1970, Rivers left art school, and became an activist at Philadelphia's Deliverance Evangelistic Church, where he conducted anti-violence outreach. During that time, he met Muhammad Kenyatta, and became involved in Kenyatta's Black Economic Development Conference, which opposed gang violence and fostered economic initiatives in the African American community. Through the national interdenominational Black Theology Project organization, which sponsored the conference, Rivers met religious scholars Vincent Harding and James H. Cone. Muhammad Kenyatta also introduced Rivers to Lucius Walker and James Forman of the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, and to the Black Liberation Theology movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_002_005, TRT: 0:29:49 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers helped Muhammad Kenyatta organize the Black Economic Development Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. However, discouraged by the corruption of local black institutions, Rivers moved to New Haven, Connecticut in 1973 to study philosophy and black political theory at Yale University. Although not enrolled as a student, he audited classes with professors Kenneth Mills and Louis Dupré, and was elected as head of the Black Student Alliance at Yale. There, he studied the works of Yosef ben-Jochannan, Haki Madhubuti, and Cheikh Anta Diop, and debated with undergraduate intellectuals like Cornel West, who was then a student at Harvard University. He also studied the epistemology of Amiri Baraka and the Congress of Afrikan People. Rivers reflects upon the Black Panther Party, and the deaths of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in 1969. He also recalls the deaths of George L. Jackson and Jonathan Jackson, and the ensuing riot at New York's Attica Correctional Facility in 1971.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Eugene Rivers, Section A2007_063_002_006, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Reverend Eugene Rivers studied informally at Yale University, where he sought a conceptual framework for black politics. Through his studies at Yale University, and the mentorship of historian and cultural theorist James G. Spady, Rivers came to define himself as a Christian Pan-Africanist. In 1976, after three years at Yale University, he was invited to formally apply as a student, but instead moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. There, he met Professor Martin Kilson, who became Rivers' mentor, and advocated for his admission to Harvard University. In 1979, Rivers was admitted as an undergraduate student, and majored in philosophy. Ten years older than his peers, his first act as a student was to protest the presence of alcohol at a cabaret held by younger black students in honor of Malcolm X. Rivers reflects upon the rhetoric and ideology of the black nationalist community in the 1970s, and remembers its proponents,

such as Jitu Weusi and Leonard Jeffries.