

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Rollins, J. Metz (Joseph Metz), 1926-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins,
Dates:	September 14, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:31).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and pastor Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins (1926 -) served as pastor of St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York from 1972 to 2005. He was active in the Civil Rights Movement including the Freedom Rides of 1961. Rollins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 14, 2007, in White Plains, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_264
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist and pastor Rev. Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. was born on September 8, 1926 in Newport News, Virginia to Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Sr. and Alice C. Rollins, as the first of two children. Rollins' father was the pastor of the Carver Memorial Presbyterian Church for forty-four years, beginning just one year before Rollins' birth. In 1970, his church had become one of the largest in the Southern Virginia Presbytery when Rollins retired.

In 1954, at the age of twenty-seven, the presbytery sent Rollins from Newport News to become the first pastor at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, Florida. There, Rollins was active in the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, which was coordinated by the Inter-Civic Council. Rollins served as treasurer for the group, working with civil rights activist Reverend C.K. Steele. During the boycott, many in the group's leadership were threatened with violence. Rollins, in particular, received death threats. Despite this, he became known for his outspoken nature and unwillingness to compromise on important issues. Rollins' activism had consequences on his career. The Florida Presbytery fired him and abandoned Trinity Presbyterian Church, which forced Rollins to take a job as a hospital orderly. His congregation, in the meantime, purchased new land and joined the "Northern Presbyterian Church," becoming Trinity United Presbyterian. Steadfast in service to civil rights, in 1961, Rollins was arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for his participation in the Freedom Rides. He was struck in the head by a rock in 1963 protesting in Nashville, Tennessee. Rollins served as Vice President of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, a branch of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference and acted as the field director for United Presbyterian's Board of Education.

In 1964, Rollins moved to New York to work as a staff member for the United Presbyterian Church; also, he continued his work in the Civil Rights Movement. Rollins became the first Executive Director of the National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1967, an organization dedicated to advocating for racial awareness within churches. The following year, Rollins lost a race for the White Plains, New York school board. As leader of the National Committee of Black Churchmen, Rollins was involved in numerous controversies in the late 1960s and

early 1970s, including the debate over James Forman’s “Black Manifesto,” which demanded reparations from white churches, and the National Committee of Black Churchmen coordinated “Black Referendum” on the Vietnam War. By 1972, the National Committee of Black Churchmen had 800 members, and Rollins had relocated to become Pastor at St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York. Rollins remained the pastor until 2005, when, at the age of seventy-eight, he became Pastor Emeritus.

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 14, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins was conducted by Adrienne Jones on September 14, 2007, in White Plains, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and pastor Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins (1926 -) served as pastor of St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York from 1972 to 2005. He was active in the Civil Rights Movement including the Freedom Rides of 1961.

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:

Rollins, J. Metz (Joseph Metz), 1926-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Rollins, J. Metz (Joseph Metz), 1926---Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

Civil rights Activists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

Pastor

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 Joseph Metz Rollins, September 14, 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 Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_001, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins was born on September 8, 1926 in Newport News, Virginia to Alice Clements Rollins and Joseph Metz Rollins, Sr. His maternal great-grandmother was a former slave from Lynchburg, Virginia. Her son, barber William Clements, married teacher Lula Fletcher Clements, who studied at the Hampton Institute, and became Rollins' maternal grandmother. She was regularly mistaken for white, and asked to leave the all-black car during train rides. Rollins' paternal grandfather, Presbyterian minister Joseph Andrew Rollins, attended Biddle University, and later became a school principal in Gastonia, North Carolina, where the black community was often harassed by the Ku Klux Klan. Rollins' mother studied education at the Hampton Institute, and his father attended the seminary at Lincoln University. They met and married in 1925, and moved to Newport News, where his father pastored the Carver Memorial Presbyterian Church. Rollins recalls his experiences of discrimination in segregated Newport News.

African American families--Virginia.

African American children--Virginia--Newport News.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_002, TRT: 0:29:24 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins began his education at John Marshall Elementary School, an overcrowded, all-black school in Newport News, Virginia. He excelled in his literature classes, and often read books that his father borrowed from the Hampton Institute library, as African Americans were barred from the public library. In Newport News, Rollins went on to attend Collis P. Huntington High School. He graduated in 1945, and received a scholarship to attend the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. After one year, he transferred to Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he worked in the kitchen to pay his tuition. Aspiring to become a pastor, Rollins majored in religious education and history. In 1950, he was ordained at the Carver Memorial Presbyterian Church, where his father was the pastor, and then returned to Johnson C. Smith University to teach. In 1953, Rollins moved to Tallahassee, Florida, where he planned to organize a church.

Segregation in transportation--Florida--Tallahassee.

African Americans--Segregation.

Tallahassee (Fla.).

African American college students--Southern States.

Segregation in education--Virginia.

African American churches--Florida--Tallahassee.

African Americans and libraries--Virginia--History.

Newport News (Va.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_003, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins was named the pastor of the Trinity United Presbyterian Church, an African American congregation in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1953. The following year, Rollins joined Tallahassee's Civil Rights Movement after two black students from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College were arrested for refusing to relinquish their bus seats. The white leaders of the United Presbyterian church suspended Rollins' salary, so he obtained an orderly position at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Hospital. Rollins also formed the Inter Civic Council to support the bus boycott in Tallahassee. He then partnered with local church leaders Charles Kenzie Steele, King Solomon DuPont, Daniel B. Speed and James Hudson to organize mass carpools, which triggered the council members' arrests. They received legal and monetary support from the NAACP, but were found guilty at trial. In 1958, Rollins moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where he joined the Nashville Christian Leadership Council.

Tallahassee (Fla.)--Race relations.

Steele, C. K. (Charles Kenzie), 1914-1980.

Segregation in transportation--Florida--Tallahassee.

Civil rights workers--Florida--Tallahassee.

Presbyterian Church--Clergy.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_004,
TRT: 0:27:14 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins joined the Nashville Christian Leadership Council in 1958, and was later appointed as its vice president. With the council's leader, Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, he organized campaigns to desegregate the community of Nashville, Tennessee. During one sit-in, Rollins was struck in the head with a rock, after which Mayor Ben West tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him from continuing the protests. In 1966, Rollins joined Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph Abernathy in Mississippi on the Meredith March Against Fear, and was among the demonstrators threatened and teargassed by highway patrolmen. From the late 1960s, Rollins lived in New York City, where he served as the executive director of the National Committee of Black Churchmen. In this role, he joined the Black Manifesto demonstration led by activist James Forman at New York City's Interchurch Center. Rollins also recalls the desegregation of his hometown of Newport News, Virginia.

Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations.

African American families--Virginia.

Civil rights demonstrations--Southern States.

African American religious leaders.

Forman, James, 1928-2005.

National Black Economic Development Conference (1969 : Detroit, Mich.).

African Americans--Reparations.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:24 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins attended Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral in Atlanta, Georgia in 1968, and mourned alongside athlete Wilt Chamberlain, musician Dizzy Gillespie and politician Robert F. Kennedy. Later that year, Rollins campaigned to join the school board of White Plains, New York on an education equality platform. He attracted an integrated voter base, but ultimately lost the election. In 1969, Rollins inaugurated Black Solidarity Day, a day of absence to protest the Vietnam War, with activist James Forman

and the National Committee of Black Churchmen. After the uprising at the Attica Correctional Facility in 1971, Rolling and Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker inspected the prison, interviewed prisoners and advocated on their behalf to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. In 1974, Rollins succeeded Elder G. Hawkins as the pastor of St. Augustine Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York. While there, he advocated for a street in the Bronx to be named Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil rights movements--Tennessee--Nashville.

Prison riots--New York (State)--Attica.

Presbyterian Church--New York (State)--Clergy.

White Plains (N.Y.)--Race relations.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--African Americans.

Cone, James H.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_006,
TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins served on the United Presbyterian Commission on Religion and Race alongside his friend, Reverend Gayraud Wilmore, in 1963. He describes his personal theology, as well as the history of African Americans in the Presbyterian church, including the election of Elder G. Hawkins, Rollins' predecessor at St. Augustine Presbyterian Church, as the first African American moderator of the United Presbyterian church. Additionally, Rollins remembers his initiation into the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity in 1945 at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, and his fraternity brother, Minister Cecil Ivory. He reflects upon his friendship with physician Dr. Russell Anderson and the history of desegregation in the South, and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Desegregation--Tennessee--Nashville.

Black theology.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil rights movements--Tennessee--Nashville.

African American Presbyterians--United States.

Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations.

Civil rights demonstrations--Mississippi.