

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth D. Rodgers

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Rodgers, Kenneth D., 1951-  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth D. Rodgers,  |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | December 9, 2004  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2004  |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:49:10).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Youth advocate Kenneth D. Rodgers (1951 - ) served as the volunteer executive director for Youth Action Ministries. Rodgers is also an engineer for A.M. Kinney Inc. in Chicago, and has served as vice president of the National Society of Black Engineers. Rodgers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 9, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2004_253   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic minded mechanical engineer, Kenneth D. Rodgers was born September 20, 1951 in Lansing, Michigan. With family roots in Mississippi, his parents, Joe and Irene Rodgers were members of Paradise Baptist Church. As a child, Rodgers was mentored by Art Jones of the National Society of Civil Engineers. Attending Allen Street Elementary School, West Junior High School, Rodgers improved his grades and graduated from Sexton High School in 1969. At the University of Detroit, Rodgers instituted New Dawn, a youth enrichment project. He graduated with a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1975 and earned a master's in mechanical engineering from Northwestern University in 2002.

Starting as a schoolteacher, Rodgers was hired as an engineer for Goodyear in Lansing. Moving to Reading, Pennsylvania in 1978, he started a youth chapter, and became president of the NAACP. He also set up a program called Brothers and Sisters. In 1982, Rodgers moved to the Chicago area. Youth Action Ministries (YAM) was founded by Reverend Hycel B. Taylor at Second Baptist Church in Evanston, Illinois that same year. Rodgers became volunteer executive director for YAM shortly thereafter. Programs instituted by Rodgers include: youth mentoring, tutoring, and self esteem workshops. Since 1989, YAM has offered an annual college tour highlighting historically Black colleges and universities. Through the EdgeUp project, Rodgers introduces students to engineering.

A member of the Evanston Zoning Board, the Coalition for the Improvement of Education in South Shore, Rodgers also serves on the boards of the Chicago Children's Museum and the Children's Defense Program. He works as an engineer for Greely Hanson in Chicago and is vice president of the National Society of Black Engineers. Honored for his community service, Rodgers is a popular motivational speaker.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth D. Rodgers was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 9, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Youth advocate Kenneth D. Rodgers (1951 - ) served as the volunteer executive director for Youth Action Ministries. Rodgers is also an engineer for A.M. Kinney Inc. in Chicago, and has served as vice president of the National Society of Black Engineers.

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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:

Rodgers, Kenneth D., 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Rodgers, Kenneth D., 1951---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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## Occupations:

Youth Advocate

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Kenneth D. Rodgers, December 9, 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).

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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 Kenneth D. Rodgers, Section A2004\_253\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Kenneth D. Rodgers was born on September 20, 1951 in Lansing, Michigan. His parents, Joe Rodgers and Irene Shipp Rodgers, were both from St. Louis, Missouri. They met at church and moved to Lansing for work. Rodgers' paternal family originated in Mississippi and his grandfather worked as a Pullman Porter and once bit off a white man's finger for pointing at him. Rodgers' father was a dye maker at General Motors Company and was active in fighting for better infrastructure and education for Lansing's African American community. Rodgers was one of nine children in a tight-knit but poor family. He remembers

the dirt streets, outdoor plumbing and vegetable gardens in his neighborhood. Rodgers was a mischievous child who got into fights, but still managed to earn good grades. He attended Allen Street Elementary School, West Junior High School, and J.W. Sexton High School. In tenth grade, he met Art Jones who encouraged his interest in architecture. He also enjoyed running, wrestling, boxing and going to church.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth D. Rodgers, Section A2004\_253\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Kenneth D. Rodgers dropped out of the University of California at Los Angeles in 1969 to return home to Lansing, Michigan and work as a drafting assistant for Motorworld, a company owned by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Goodyear paid for him to attend the University of Detroit in Detroit, Michigan part time, and Rodgers graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1975. Meanwhile, Rodgers participated in many civic organizations. He and his wife moved to Reading, Pennsylvania where he worked as an engineer for Gilbert/Commonwealth, Inc. and became president of the local NAACP. In 1980, they moved to Chicago, Illinois. Rodgers worked at the architectural firm A.M. Kinney, Inc. and became director of Youth Action Ministry (YAM) through Second Baptist Church in Evanston, Illinois. The program encourages African American children to pursue higher education and civic engagement. He describes his approach with the children in YAM, his motivational philosophy and the children's role in the organization.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth D. Rodgers, Section A2004\_253\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Kenneth D. Rodgers and his group Youth Action Ministry (YAM) experienced several instances of racism, including being shot at by the Ku Klux Klan, during trips throughout the 1990s. Rodgers describes a Youth Action Ministry (YAM) self-esteem workshop and the mentors and tutors from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois who help the children in the group. Rodgers reflects upon the organization's connection to Africa signified by the acronym YAM, as well as the historical significance of its founding organization, Second Baptist Church in Evanston, Illinois. He talks about speaking at HistoryMaker Tavis Smiley's Youth to Leaders program, which motivates African American children to strive for success. Rodgers describes educational opportunities for African American children, including HBCUs, and being prepared for higher education and scholarship opportunities. He also stresses the importance of instilling self-esteem in African American children and ensuring they know their history.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth D. Rodgers, Section A2004\_253\_001\_004, TRT: 0:22:30 ?

Kenneth D. Rodgers threw a rock at his third-grade teacher's head and injured her badly. He reconnected with the teacher years later when assigned to be her student-teacher, and he used the opportunity to make amends. His story became an example of how children could recover from mistakes and initial bad decisions. Rodgers describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, focusing on the need for education, community support, and remembering ancestors' sacrifices. Rodgers talks about the pride his parents felt for the work he has done for the African American community. He reflects upon his legacy, describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.