



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Grigsby, Jefferson Eugene
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby,
Dates:	July 11, 2007 and July 13, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007, 2007
Physical Description:	10 Betacam SP videocassettes (4:50:35).
Abstract:	Art professor, fine artist, and high school art teacher Jefferson Eugene Grigsby (1918 -) was selected in 1958 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to represent the United States as an art teacher at the Children's Creative Center at the Brussels World Fair. Grigsby published <i>Art and Ethics: Background for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society</i> , the first book ever written for art teachers by an African American artist and author. Grigsby was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 11, 2007, July 13, 2007, in Phoenix, Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_204
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art professor, fine artist, and high school art teacher Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. was born on October 17, 1918, in Greensboro, North Carolina, to Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Sr. and Perry Lyon Dixon. Grigsby first discovered his love for art after his family moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, when he was nine years old. In 1933, Grigsby attended Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. Within a year, Grigsby transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he first met his long time mentor, Hale Woodruff. Grigsby graduated from Morehouse College in 1938, with B.A. degree and because of Woodruff, he was equipped with extensive artistic experience that he would retain throughout his life. Grigsby went on to obtain his M.A. degree in art (1940) from Ohio State University and his Ph.D. degree from New York University (1963).

In 1942, Grigsby volunteered to serve in World War II and became a master sergeant of the 573rd Ordnance Ammunition Company under U.S. Army General George Patton during the Battle of the Bulge. In 1943, Grigsby married Rosalyn Thomasena Marshall, a high school biology teacher and social activist. Three years later, at the invitation of the school's principal, W.A. Robinson, Grigsby began working at Carver High School as an art teacher. After the closing of the school in 1954, Grigsby began working at Phoenix Union High School where he remained until 1966.

In 1958, Grigsby was selected by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to represent the United States as an art teacher at the Children's Creative Center at the Brussels World Fair in Belgium. This experience inspired Grigsby to initiate a number of art programs in community centers, housing projects and day care centers in the

Phoenix area.

Grigsby began teaching at the university level in 1966, working at the School of Art at Arizona State University until 1988. During this time, Grigsby published "Art and Ethics: Background for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society," the first book ever written for art teachers by an African American artist and author.

In 2001, "The Art of Eugene Grigsby Jr.: A 65 Year Retrospective" was featured at the Phoenix Art Museum. The exhibition featured insightful commentary of Grigsby's life and influence on the art and education world by his many colleagues, friends and family.

Grigsby served on the boards of numerous organizations, including the National Art Education Association, the Committee on Minority Concerns and Artists of the Black Community/Arizona. Grigsby has also been awarded numerous times for his outstanding work, including the Arizona Governor's "Tostenrud" Art Award and the NAACP's Man of the Year Award.

Grigsby lives with his wife in their Phoenix home. They have two sons, Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, III and Marshall Grigsby, who both have been recognized as educators.

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 11, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby was conducted by Jacques Lesure on July 11, 2007 and July 13, 2007, in Phoenix, Arizona, and was recorded on 10 Betacam SP videocassettes. Art professor, fine artist, and high school art teacher Jefferson Eugene Grigsby (1918 -) was selected in 1958 by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City to represent the United States as an art teacher at the Children's Creative Center at the Brussels World Fair. Grigsby published Art and Ethics: Background for Teaching Youth in a Pluralistic Society, the first book ever written for art teachers by an African American artist and author.

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:

Grigsby, J. Eugene (Jefferson Eugene), 1918-.

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer).

Stearns, Scott

Hickey, Matthew

(Videographer).

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Grigsby, J. Eugene (Jefferson Eugene), 1918---Interviews.

African American artists--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Arizona State University

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

ArtMakers

ArtMakers

EducationMakers

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 Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, July 11, 2007, July 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 7/27/2011 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, July 11, 2007, July 13, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/07/11

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. slates the interview and lists his favorites. His mother, Perry Lyon Dixon, was raised in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, and his father, Jefferson Eugene Grigsby Sr., in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Grigsby notes that his father was a lieutenant in World War I. The Grigsby's moved to cities such as Prairie-View, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a result of his father's college teaching jobs. He remembers a particular racial incident in Prairie-View involving his father and a store-owner. Grigsby shares that he had wanted to be an actor when he was young, but when he met a neighbor during his time in Winston-Salem he became interested in painting and art in general.

Prairie View (Tex.)--Race relations.

African American families--North Carolina.

African American parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/07/11

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. discusses his childhood experiences in Charlotte, North Carolina, in particular his paper route and meeting Walker Foster, who was a brick mason and an artist. He says that he became Foster's art apprentice and improved his painting abilities. Grigsby talks about his education at Second Ward High School in Charlotte, where his father was the principal. He notes that after he graduated in 1934, he attended Johnson C. Smith University, but he did not enjoy his time there and after meeting the Morehouse College president, Samuel Archer, he transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Grigsby provides information about his time at Morehouse, in particular noting those who influenced him including Ann Cook, Nancy Prophet

and Hale Woodruff among others. He reflects further on Hale Woodruff, describing him as an older brother figure for him.

African Americans--Education, Secondary--North Carolina--Charlotte.

Woodruff, Hale, 1900-1980.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

African Americans-Childhood.

African American education—Education (Higher).

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2007/07/11

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. continues to talk about the impact that Hale Woodruff had on him and his art, and his introduction to African art. Grigsby says that he left Morehouse in 1938, to attend American Artists School in New York, New York. While attending American Artists school, Grigsby met other artists like Charles Austin, Jacob Lawrence and Romare Beardon. Grigsby also talks about his friendship with Langston Hughes. Grigsby speaks on his experience with the Works Progress Administration and the club scene in 1930s Harlem. He decided to go to Ohio State University for his M.A. degree, where he wrote his thesis entitled, "The Influence of African Art on Modern Art." Grigsby describes instances of racism that he experienced at Ohio State and The Ohio State Playmakers theatre group that he and his friends created.

Woodruff, Hale, 1900-1980.

United States. Work Projects Administration (N.Y.).

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

African American artists--New York.

Ohio State University--Race relations.

African American--Art--Study and teaching.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/07/11

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. further discusses his time at Ohio State University and his group the Ohio State Playmakers. He talks about the challenges and issues that arose while he was writing his master's thesis. In addition, he provides information about how he met his wife Thomasena Marshall, his time at Johnson C. Smith University as an artist-in-residence and his experience as an art instructor at Bethune-Cookman College (now known as Bethune-Cookman University) in Daytona Beach, Florida. Grigsby volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army, but he did not want to see combat. However, he was sent to Europe, where he became master sergeant of the 573rd Ordnance Ammunition Company. Grigsby speaks about how he devised a new method of loading and unloading ammunition that saved the company a lot of time.

Ohio State University--Social Life and customs.

Bethune-Cookman College (Daytona Beach, Fla.)--Faculty.

Arts--Study and teaching (Higher).

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

United States. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/07/11

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. provides information about the talent group that he and other soldiers created in Europe and their performances. He speaks about the process of making and choosing the scenery for the productions and

for the show, "Two Points Shy," which was a popular success. When he returned from the war, he married Thomasena in 1943, and had one son, Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, III. In 1946, he was hired at Carver High School in Phoenix, Arizona. At Carver High School, he started the art department there and taught students like Rip Woods. Grigsby taught there until 1954, when the school closed down and he moved on to Phoenix Union High School where he chaired the art department. In 1958, he went to the Brussels World's Fair in Belgium to teach art to children.

African American soldiers-Social life and customs.

African American art teachers--Phoenix (Ariz.).

Exposition universelle et internationale (1958 : Brussels, Belgium).

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_002_006, TRT: 0:29:20 2007/07/13

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. discusses his enrollment at École des Beaux-Arts in Marseilles, France in 1945, and his time at Carver under the administration of Principal W.A. Robinson. Grigsby gives his perspective of the differences between a commercial artist and a fine artist. Then he describes working at Phoenix Union High School and pursuing his Ph.D. degree from New York University in New York, New York, in 1963.

Ecole supérieure des beaux-arts (Marseille).

Arts--Study and teaching (Higher).

Commercial artist.

Artist.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_002_007, TRT: 0:30:20 2007/07/13

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. reflects on his time at the Brussels World's Fair in Belgium, where he worked with the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Victor D'Amico, who had developed art rooms at the world's fair for children to stimulate their creativity. In addition, he enjoyed meeting and working with children of all different cultures. After acquiring hepatitis, he returned to the United States to finish his Ph.D. degree at New York University in New York and then received an honorary doctorate from Philadelphia University of Art. Grigsby then discusses teaching art at Arizona State University, and compares teaching university level art and high school art.

Exposition universelle et internationale (1958 : Brussels, Belgium).

Art--Study and teaching (Higher).

Art--Study and teaching (Secondary).

Arizona State University--Faculty.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_002_008, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/07/13

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. discusses the grant he obtained to interview African American artists, such as Samella Lewis, Jacob Lawrence, Sam Gilliam, Bob Blackburn and others about the way they approached their art. In addition, he notes that he became the vice president of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) and was in charge of organizing a conference around the theme, "A Celebration of the People." Grigsby remembers traveling to Europe, South America, the Caribbean and to Africa during the late 1970s. When he interacted with Africans, they themselves did not know the breadth of African Art. Grigsby shares his artistic influences, especially the Kuba style of art. He talks about the creation of the Consortium of Black Organizations and

Others for the Arts (COBA).
African American artists--Interviews.
National Art Education Association.
African American art--African influences.
Art, Kuba.
Artists and community--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_002_009, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/07/13

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. continues to discuss the Consortium of Black Organizations and Others for the Arts' (COBA) programs and awards, and Katherine Dunham, who was the first speaker to participate in the program. Grigsby was forced to retire from Arizona State University in 1988. During retirement, he focused more on COBA, other community organizations and wrote articles for the "African Review of Art" magazine. Grigsby talks about his efforts to reach young African American artists in Phoenix, Arizona, including a program in partnership with Rip Woods. In addition, when he became a member of the Arizona Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), he was able to convince them that arts should be considered job development. Grigsby hopes that young people will begin to value both the arts and the sciences, and that it is important to have teachers who value each student individually.

Artists and community--United States.
Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America--Arizona--Phoenix.
African American youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Section A2007_204_002_010, TRT: 0:25:25 2007/07/13

Jefferson Eugene Grigsby, Jr. talks about how he values the support and love that his wife and his two sons have given him over the years and reminds people to respect each other.
African American families.