

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with E. Ethelbert Miller

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Miller, E. Ethelbert
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller,
Dates:	July 27, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:38:13).
Abstract:	Poet and academic administrator E. Ethelbert Miller (1950 -) was the author of "Andromeda," "The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles," "In Search of Color Everywhere" and "Fathering Words," and the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University. Miller was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 27, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_216
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Academic administrator, author, and poet Eugene Ethelbert Miller was born on November 20, 1950, the youngest of three children, to Egberto Miller, an immigrant from Panama, and Enid Marshall Miller, a homemaker. Born in New York City in the South Bronx, Miller attended Howard University in the fall of 1968. While at Howard University, he studied with Stephen Henderson, one of the foremost literary critics of the Black Arts Movement. In 1972, he graduated from Howard University with a degree in Afro-American Studies, the first member of his family to graduate from college.

In 1974, Miller became Director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University, allowing him to develop his own talents and to nurture emerging African American artists. Also in 1974, he published his first two collections of poetry, *Andromeda* and *The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles*. In 1979, Marion Barry, Mayor of Washington, D.C., proclaimed September 28, 1979 "E. Ethelbert Miller Day," and Barry presented Miller with the Mayor's Art Award for Literature in 1982. In 1994, Miller published the anthology *In Search of Color Everywhere*, which won the 1994 PEN Oakland Josephine Mile Award. Three years later, he received the Stephen E. Henderson Award for outstanding achievement in literature and poetry from the African American Literature and Culture Society. In 2000, Miller wrote *Fathering Words*, a memoir which traced his family background and the roots of his art as an African American writer.

Miller is a board member of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), Network of Educators on the Americas and The Writer's Center. He is a former board member of the Associated Writing Programs and the Humanities Council of Washington and has also worked previously as a core faculty member of the Bennington Writing Seminars at Bennington College. Miller is an advisory editor for the *African American Review* and an advisory board member of *Arts & Letters: Journal of Contemporary Culture*. In addition to these responsibilities, Miller has also remained the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University. He is married to Denise King-Miller,

and has two children, Jasmine Simone and Nyere Gibran.

E. Ethelbert Miller was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 27, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with E. Ethelbert Miller was conducted by Cheryl Butler on July 27, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Poet and academic administrator E. Ethelbert Miller (1950 -) was the author of "Andromeda," "The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles," "In Search of Color Everywhere" and "Fathering Words," and the director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University.

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:

Miller, E. Ethelbert

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Miller, E. Ethelbert--Interviews

African American poets--Interviews

Miller, E. Ethelbert--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Academic Administrator

Poet

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 E. Ethelbert Miller, July 27, 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 E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_001, TRT: 0:29:18
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E. Ethelbert Miller was born on November 20, 1950 in New York City to Enid Marshall Miller and Egberto Miller. His paternal great-uncle, Walter A. Miller, cofounded New York City's Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association. Miller's father was born in Panama; and, as a small child, migrated with his grandmother and mother, Marie Miller, to New York City. Later, he was employed as a maintenance man and postal worker there. Miller's maternal family came from Barbados to New York City, where his mother was born to Edgerton Marshall. In the Bronx, New York, Miller attended the diverse P.S. 39 and Paul Laurence Dunbar J.H.S. 120; and, at thirteen years old, moved to the St. Mary's Park Houses with his family, including his two older siblings, Richard Miller and Marie Miller Hunter. As a teenager, Miller befriended his neighbor, the noted anthropologist Elliott Skinner, from whom he learned about Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey and the Civil Rights Movement.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Blacks--West Indies--Race identity.

Blacks--Caribbean Area--Migrations.

Skinner, Elliott P. (Elliott Percival), 1924-2007.

African Americans--Education (Elementary).

Neighborhoods--New York (State)--New York.

Bronx (New York, N.Y.)--Ethnic relations.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30
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E. Ethelbert Miller grew up in New York City, where he belonged to St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. His family attended Midnight Mass each Christmas, and ate West Indian food together on Thanksgiving. They lived in the integrated South Bronx neighborhood in the 1960s, when the Seven Crowns gang was prevalent. Miller was a student at Christopher Columbus High School, where he excelled in history, and read 'Profile of the Future' by Arthur C. Clarke. In 1967, he met Paul Simon of Simon and Garfunkel at an anti-Vietnam War rally organized by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After graduating in 1969, he worked at the Bookazine Company, Inc., where he became acquainted with Lewis H. Michaux, the owner of the African National Memorial Bookstore. He also met Minister Louis Farrakhan at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Additionally, Miller's brother, Richard Miller, integrated the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, New York, where he studied to become a Trappist Monk.

Cooking, West Indian.

West Indies--Social life and customs.

Gangs--New York (State)--New York.

Black Muslims.

Farrakhan, Louis.

African American churches--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20
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E. Ethelbert Miller majored in history at Howard University in Washington, D.C. There, he protested against the university administration and the Vietnam War with his roommate, Reggie Hudgins. Miller was inspired to write poetry by folk singers Bob Dylan and Buffy Sainte-Marie; and studied English under Bill Thomas, Jennifer Jordan and Stephen E. Henderson, who became his mentor. He also met SNCC members Charles E. Cobb, Jr. and Courtland Cox, and considered pursuing a career in law and politics. In the 1970s, Miller began recording video oral histories with his friend, Steven Jones. His first interview was with Sterling A. Brown, a poet and professor. While interviewing his brother, Catholic monk Richard Miller, Miller learned more about the spirituality of their father, Egberto Miller. During this time, Miller became interested in Sufi mysticism, and was influenced by Professor Lonnie Cross, who was the head of the local mosque.

African American Catholics.

African American clergy.

African American fathers.

Howard University.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.).

Riots--Washington (D.C.).

Cobb, Charles E., Jr.

Henderson, Stephen Evangelist, 1925-.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_004, TRT: 0:29:22
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E. Ethelbert Miller attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. with dancer Debbie Allen and poet Haki Madhubuti, and studied under historian C.L.R. James and writer John Oliver Killens. During his time there, the student body protested the leadership of President James Nabrit, Jr. In 1968, James E. Cheek became president, and hired Andrew Billingsley as the vice president of academic affairs. Billingsley recruited Joyce Ladner, Robert Staples and Stephen E. Henderson to the faculty, and founded the university's Institute for Arts and Humanities, appointing literary scholar Houston A. Baker, Jr. as the first director. In 1972, Henderson became the head of the institute; and, in 1975, Miller joined its staff. Under Henderson's mentorship, Miller learned more about poetry, and attended the university's first writers' conference, which featured authors Amiri Baraka and Gwendolyn Brooks. Miller also talks about the contributions of writers James Baldwin and Harryette Mullen to the Black Arts Movement.

Howard University--Faculty.

Cheek, James E.

Billingsley, Andrew.

Henderson, Stephen Evangelist, 1925-.

Stokes, Bob.

James, C. L. R. (Cyril Lionel Robert), 1901-1989.

Black Arts movement.

Baker, Houston A.

Blues (Music)--Social aspects--Study and teaching.

African Americans--Music--History and criticism.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_005, TRT: 0:29:59
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E. Ethelbert Miller met author James Baldwin at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Early in Miller's own writing career, he was inspired by poets Amiri Baraka and Haki Madhubuti. Additionally, Miller was introduced to poets Lorenzo Thomas, Wanda Coleman, Dolores Kendrick and May Miller by writer Ahmos Zu-Bolton; and, through poet Quincy Troupe, met novelist Toni Morrison. From 1974, Miller directed Howard University's African American Studies Resource Center, and organized the writers' conferences on campus. In 1978, his first book, 'Migrant Worker,' was published by the Washington Writers' Publishing House. Miller also released 'Season of Hungry/Cry of Rain' through Broadside Lotus Press, and edited the anthology 'Women Surviving Massacres and Men.' Miller was active with the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, and knew Washington D.C. mayors Marion Barry and Sharon Pratt. He also describes the role of authors June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez and Terry McMillian in the women's movement of the 1970s.

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987.

Howard University--History--20th century.

Poetry, Modern--20th century--History and criticism--Theory, etc.

African American authors--Political and social views.

Barry, Marion, 1936-.

Washington (D.C.)--Social conditions--20th century.

Washington (D.C.)--Social life and customs.

Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 1944-.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_006, TRT: 0:29:08
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E. Ethelbert Miller accompanied poet Haki Madhubuti and activist Queen Mother Moore to a Pan-African conference in Africa, where he was inspired to write 'The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles.' He also edited 'In Search of Color Everywhere' with the help of publisher Marie Brown; and wrote his memoir, 'Fathering Words: The Making of an African American Writer,' after the death of his brother, Richard Miller, and father, Egberto Miller. At the time of the interview, Miller was writing 'The 5th Inning,' and had recently donated his papers to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In addition, one of his poems was being engraved at the Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C. Miller recalls marrying Michelle Calhoun Greene in 1973; and talks about his current wife, Denise King Miller, and their children, Jasmine-Simone Miller Morgan and Nyere-Gibran Miller. He also reflects upon his career, and his mentorship of poets like Dolores Kendrick, Reuben Jackson and Wanda Coleman.

African Americans--Marriage.

Pan-Africanism--Congresses.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963--Criticism and interpretation.

Miller, E. Ethelbert.

Brothers and sisters--Death--Psychological aspects.

Literature--History and criticism--Theory, etc.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_007, TRT: 0:27:48
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E. Ethelbert Miller travelled extensively, including to the Soviet Union, where he visited Moscow and Leningrad. In the early 1980s, he visited war torn Iraq, where he witnessed bombings, and saw people of Sudanese descent working in

Baghdad. He also visited Saudi Arabia and Norway, and wrote a poem about his experiences in Cuba with anthropologist Johnnetta B. Cole. Miller began his career at Howard University's Institute for the Arts and Humanities, and was later appointed to direct the African American Studies Resource Center. In this role, he acquired Ghanaian President Kwame Nrumah's papers for the university's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. Additionally, Miller was honored with the inscription of his poem about the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C. He talks about poets Essex Hemphill and Chasen Gaver, and the impact of the black aesthetic on popular culture. Miller also shares a message to future generations.

Cuba--Description and travel.

Soviet Union--Description and travel.

Norway--Race relations.

Baghdad (Iraq)--Social conditions.

Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988.

Authorship--Vocational guidance.

African American universities and colleges.

Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_008, TRT: 0:13:48
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E. Ethelbert Miller narrates his photographs.