



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:	E. Ethelbert Miller
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller,
Dates:	July 27, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:43:48).
Abstract:	Academic administrator, author, and poet E. Ethelbert Miller (1950 -) is author of <i>Andromeda</i> , <i>The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles</i> , <i>In Search of Color Everywhere</i> and <i>Fathering Words</i> . 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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Academic administrator, author, and poet E. Ethelbert Miller (1950 -) is author of *Andromeda*, *The Land of Smiles and the Land of No Smiles*, *In Search of Color Everywhere* and *Fathering Words*.

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

Howard University Afro-American Resource Study Center

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

MediaMakers

ArtMakers

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 8/15/2011 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 27, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with E. Ethelbert Miller, Section A2007_216_001_001, TRT: 0:29:18 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller discusses his family background in the West Indies, his family's racial identity, elementary school, and moving to the projects in the South Bronx. When Miller was thirteen, his family moved from Longwood Avenue to the St. Mary's housing projects. This was a significant change for Miller. The projects were in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, and he became friends with several Puerto Ricans. Elliott Skinner was a famous anthropologist, United States ambassador to Burkina Faso and the first African American department chair at Columbia University. Skinner's father lived in the same building as the Millers in the South Bronx and was a supporter of Garveyism. The senior Skinner spoke to Miller about the social history of African Americans following Malcolm X's assassination. Prior to college, this conversation was the extent of Miller's exposure to African American history.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller discusses family food and gatherings in West Indian family celebrations. The family attended St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, a racially mixed church in the neighborhood. The only real racial tension in the area of the South Bronx occurred when conflict between the Crowns, a Puerto Rican gang, and members of another gang grew violent. Shortly before college, Miller worked for a book distributor and met a bookstore owner from Harlem named Mr. Michaux who was a "race man". Miller mentions several books that had an impact on him. He recalls his first interactions with Black Muslims and when began hearing the name Louis Farrakhan. Miller admired the relaxed demeanor employed by Farrakhan during his early speeches. Miller remembers being shocked the first time he visited a black church in Washington, D.C. at the animated delivery of the sermons.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller speaks about his brother leaving for the monastery. He discusses his variable relationship with his father, Egberto. Miller also ponders

the anger people feel about race, both white and black, and how he does not understand how that could happen. He recalls his choice of Howard University for study, the riots that occurred around Howard's campus and his introduction to tear gas. Miller remembers his favorite professors at Howard and that he met several students who would go on to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), including Charlie Cobb. As a student at Howard, Miller recorded an oral history for several people. He discusses Stephen Henderson, a poetry critic, who was very influential to Miller by showing him the role and responsibility of an African American scholar. While attending Howard, Miller was introduced to Sunni Islam, but he eventually decided not to become a Muslim.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller discusses several notable people who attended Howard University with him. He remembers that Howard president James E. Cheek had a unique relationship with the radical students and the faculty. Miller mentions Andrew Billingsley, who recruited the best black scholars in the world to the Howard faculty. Miller also took a class taught by C.L.R. James, a famous communist. During that period, Miller became very aware of the Black Arts Movement; he compares the volume of art created at Howard University during the early 1970s to that of the Harlem Renaissance. Bob Stokes, a playwright, became a mentor for Miller and gifted Miller his entire library. Miller describes study of the blues and explains that it possesses the foundation for the future work of African American cultural theorists like Houston Baker. He also discusses the work of Stephen Henderson and his research on the blues.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller discusses his relationship with James Baldwin and names several literary figures he met at Howard University. Miller describes his early poems as well as his creative process. He addresses the lyrical nature of his work and refers to himself as a literary activist. Miller recalls becoming

involved in the feminist movement at Howard during the 1970s and notes that modern African American writers have refused to be overtly political. While they have mastered form, they have not made political statements or engendered political change. Miller describes how his involvement with Marion Barry and the Washington, D.C. cultural scene changed his writing.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller discusses both of his marriages. He also mentions his two children. Miller then describes the Pan African Congress in 1974, for which he was a member of the American delegation. He remembers his time in Africa as a profound experience where he found evidence of the double consciousness studied by W.E.B. Du Bois. Miller remembers being torn about where home was. He also describes his favorites of his published books and their significance to him. One of them was his memoir, "Fathering Words"; the other was "In Search of Color Everywhere". Miller talks about his brother's influence on him, his brother's death at the age of forty and how it aged him. He theorizes about how tragedy affects literature and writers' responsibilities during social crises to be literary activists. Miller discusses the influence he has had on other poets.

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 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller describes his international travel to various countries, including Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Norway. While visiting Norway, he noticed that race seemed to be no issue at all. He also visited Baghdad in the 1980s and was shocked at the proximity of the missiles shooting back and forth from Tehran in Iran and Baghdad in Iraq. Miller continually looks for ways to bridge gaps between people. He criticizes today's Howard as failing to continue to be the Black University.

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:
0:19:23 2007/07/27

E. Ethelbert Miller narrates his personal photographs.