Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: J. Metz Rollins

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with J. Metz Rollins,

Dates: September 14, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:56:31).

Abstract: Civil rights activist and pastor J. 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.

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 J. Metz Rollins was conducted by Adirenne Jones on September 14, 2007, in White Plains, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and pastor J. 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

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Rollins, Joseph Metz

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

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


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, September 14, 2007
Video Oral History Interview with J. Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_001, TRT: 0:29:27
2007/09/14

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. discusses his family background. His discussion focuses on his mother, father, and grandparents. Rollins’ parents, Alice Clio Klimits and Rev. Joseph Metz Rollins Sr., married in 1925 after Rollins Sr. graduated from Lincoln University. Rollins’ mother was a teacher in Lynchburg, Virginia and later attended Hampton Institute, now Hampton University. Rollins’ father’s middle name, Metz, honors the friendship of a classmate. Rollins also discusses his childhood and Newport News, Virginia, the community in which he grew up.

African American families--Virginia
African American children--Virginia--Newport News

Video Oral History Interview with J. Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_002, TRT: 0:29:24
2007/09/14

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. discusses his childhood and school memories. Rollins also discusses the segregated school system in Newport News and being heavily influenced by his father, a minister, who would bring home books from Hampton Institute because public libraries were not open to blacks. Rollins remembers his college experiences at Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, and Johnson C. Smith University. Rollins knew he wanted to become a minister because of his father and family influences. Rollins discusses being ordained. Rollins continues to talk about his life after graduating from Johnson C. Smith University, detailing his career path and family life. Rollins details his efforts in the organization of the Negro churches in Tallahassee and the Tallahassee Bus Boycott of 1954.

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 J. Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_003, TRT: 0:30:43
2007/09/14

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. discusses the Tallahassee Bus Boycott where two black girls were arrested because they refused to give up their seat. Rollins recalls the newspaper headline and his desire to get involved. He details the development of the Inter-Civic Council, which was created to support the students pushing the boycott. Rollins talks about C.K. Steele, K.S. Dupoint, and Martin Luther King Jr. Rollins recalls having church services at his home, and later worshiping in an auditorium. Rollins discusses his bond with the African American community. When white members of the Presbyterian Church encouraged him to remove himself and he did not, they terminated his salary.
Rollins discusses leaving Florida for Nashville when the Presbyterian Church hired a white pastor. Rollins also talks about his involvement with the Nashville Christian Leadership Council.

Tallahassee (Fla.)--Race relations--History
Steele, C. K.--(Charles Kenzie)--1914-1980
Segregation in transportation--Florida--Tallahassee
Civil rights workers--Florida--Tallahassee
African American Presbyterians--Clergy


Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. discusses his involvement with the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. Rollins recalls an experience when he was struck with a rock on the head requiring stitches. Rollins describes his family and their vacations as a means to escape social problems in Nashville, Tennessee. Rollins recalls the segregated beaches in Newport News, Virginia and Bay Shore beach, which was owned by an African American. Rollins also discusses his move to New York where he became a founding member of National Committee of Black Churchmen. Rollins talks about the Freedom March, which extended from Memphis, Tennessee to Philadelphia, Mississippi. Rollins shares his involvement in the Black Manifesto with James Forman.

Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations
African American families--Virginia
Civil rights demonstrations--Southern States
African American religious leaders
Forman, James, 1928-2005
African Americans--Reparations

Video Oral History Interview with J. Metz Rollins, Section A2007_264_001_005, TRT: 0:29:24 2007/09/14

Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. compares James Cone and James Forman. Rollins notes every major church has vocal African American activists. Rollins talks about his experience with the death and funeral of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. where he saw President Nixon and Senator Robert Kennedy. Rollins discusses his involvement in the National Committee of Black Churchmen and the Vietnam War. He recalls Dr. King’s 1967 speech at the Riverside Church in New York City where King spoke out against the war. Rollins discusses becoming a pastor in Bronx, New York and traveling for his sermons. He was pastor of the St. Augustine Presbyterian Church for twenty-five years. Rollins recalls his experience in White Plains, New York including running for the school board and emphasizing integration. He talks about the Attica prison riot and the Christian riot.

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
Reverend Joseph Metz Rollins, Jr. discusses his theology. Rollins talks about the writings of James Cone on black theology and Gay Wilmore on black Presbyterians. When discussing the progression of the Black Presbyterian Church, Rollins explains there remains a lot more to be done. He describes his experiences with the desegregation of the South. Rollins talks about the desegregation process in Nashville, Tennessee. Rollins explores the benefits of knowing different types of people. He discusses his desired legacy as an activist and agitator. Rollins remembers Martin Luther King Jr. as a friend and fellow activist, while recalling the Freedom March in Mississippi.

Desegregation--Tennessee--Nashville
Black theology
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
Civil rights movement--Tennessee--Nashville
African American Presbyterians--United States
Nashville (Tenn.)--Race relations
Civil rights demonstrations--Mississippi