

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rodney Reynolds

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Reynolds, Rodney J., 1958-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds,
Dates:	July 13, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:32:31).
Abstract:	Magazine publishing entrepreneur Rodney Reynolds (1958 -), founder and publisher of American Legacy Magazine, serves as president of RJR Communications, Inc. and executive producer of American Legacy Television. Reynolds was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 13, 2013, in Mt. Vernon, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_203
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine publisher Rodney J. Reynolds was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended the University of Cincinnati where he studied graphic design and advertising. Reynolds undertook his first publishing venture with a national, general purpose publication targeted towards African American men, *Spectrum Magazine*.

In 1992, Reynolds and Corporate Cleveland Magazine developed *Minority Business*, a quarterly publication where he served as publisher and editor. He went on to publish *New Visions* and *Renaissance Magazine*. He also developed *Today*, a magazine that focused on African American families. Reynolds founded RJR Communications, Inc. in 1992. In 1995, Reynolds, along with Forbes, Inc., began publishing *American Legacy Magazine*, which centered on African American history and culture. In February of 2001, RJR Communications and New Millennium Studios, founded by entertainer Timothy Reid, launched American Legacy Television, a nationally syndicated television program. Reynolds has served on the board of directors for the Mount Vernon Public Library, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Central & Northern Westchester, the Harriett Tubman Home, and the Rye Country Day School. He was appointed as the diversity chairperson for the New York Blood Center - Westchester Region. In addition, Reynolds is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

In 1998, Reynolds received the "Forty Under 40 Award" from *The Network Journal*. In addition, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. honored his work with the Lillian Award. He received the Percy E. Sutton Award from the Harlem Business Alliance; the Visionary Award from the African American Men of Westchester; the National Business Leader of the Year Award from the African American Chamber of Commerce of Westchester & Rockland County; and the 2002 Triangle of Service Award from the Southeast Regional African American Preservation Alliance. In 2004, Reynolds received the inaugural Earl G. Graves Entrepreneurial Award; and, in 2005 he was the recipient of the W.O. Walker Community Excellence Award.

Rodney J. Reynolds was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 13, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rodney Reynolds was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 13, 2013, in Mt. Vernon, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Magazine publishing entrepreneur Rodney Reynolds (1958 -), founder and publisher of American Legacy Magazine, serves as president of RJR Communications, Inc. and executive producer of American Legacy Television.

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:

Reynolds, Rodney J., 1958-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Reynolds, Rodney J., 1958- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine Publishing Entrepreneur

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Rodney Reynolds, July 13, 2013. 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 Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_001, TRT: 1:28:18
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Rodney Jerome Reynolds was born on September 9, 1958 in Cleveland, Ohio to Jessie Bernice Short Reynolds and Ellis Reynolds, Sr. Both of his parents were born in Kentucky. Reynolds' maternal grandparents, John W. Short and Ella Short lived in Indiana, where his grandfather worked as a coal miner. He was legally blind but still walked to and from work, and back for lunch, every day.

He eventually died of emphysema caused by black lung disease, and Reynolds's maternal grandmother relied on his miner's pension in her old age. Reynolds never knew his paternal grandfather and had only vague memories of his paternal grandmother, Jeneva Civllins Reynolds, whom he called Mama Jennie. He was the youngest of three children born to his parents. His older siblings, Ellis Reynolds Jr. and Joyce Reynolds McMickens, were teenagers when he was born. Reynolds grew up in Cleveland, where his father worked for the black-owned Crayton's Sausage Company. Reynolds's parents divorced in 1971, when he was thirteen years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_002, TRT: 2:29:01
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Rodney Reynolds grew up in the Glenville and Hough neighborhoods of Cleveland, Ohio during his early childhood. When he was in the fourth grade, his parents, Jessie Bernice Short Reynolds and Ellis Reynolds, Sr., separated because of his father's alcoholism and abuse. He and his mother moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where they initially lived with relatives before moving to an apartment in the projects. After one year, they returned to their home in Cleveland, but soon moved out to live with Reynolds' older sister and her husband. Reynolds attended numerous schools during this time due to their frequent moves. He also learned to play trumpet and enjoyed football and baseball. When Reynolds was about to enter middle school, his mother decided to move again so that he could attend school in a better district. With help from Reynolds's older brother, who worked in sales for Durkee's Famous Foods, they moved to an apartment in the Lee-Harvard neighborhood of Indianapolis.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_003, TRT: 3:31:32
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Rodney Reynolds and his mother eventually moved back to Cleveland, Ohio, where they attended University Church of Christ. Reynolds had his first business venture during middle school, when he began selling spots in line at the local Pendleton Barber Shop. He attended the majority-black John F. Kennedy High School, where he was mentored by his track coach, printing teacher, and football coach Roy Kidd. Reynolds intended to attend Fisk University on a football scholarship, but he decided to follow his girlfriend to The University of Cincinnati instead. Although he was not able to play football there, he joined the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity and excelled in his printing courses in the School of Design, Architecture and Art. He also worked in the production area at the Arrow Blue printing company. Upon graduating, Reynolds decided to pursue a career in the field of printing and publishing. He returned to Cleveland, where he founded a fashion and lifestyle magazine for black men called Spectrum Magazine in 1980.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_004, TRT: 4:28:51
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Rodney Reynolds worked for a small print shop in Cincinnati, Ohio after graduating from The University of Cincinnati School of Design, Architecture and Art. With his mother's support, he decided to found a black men's lifestyle magazine called Spectrum. He struggled to finance the publication, but eventually he was able to find an investor. The first issue featured a cover story on NASA scientist Julian Manly Earls, whom Reynolds met through his fraternity, as well as contributions from GQ writer Gordon Lee. However, the magazine soon shuttered due to conflicts with the investor. Around this time, Reynolds met his wife, Lillian Freeman Reynolds, at a choir concert in Cleveland. Reynolds found work at Wesley and Associates advertising agency,

where he rose through the ranks and eventually became a partner. Despite his success in advertising, Reynolds decided to return to publishing in 1988. He went on to create magazines like *New Visions*, *Renaissance*, *Today's Black Father*, and *Minority Business*.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_005, TRT: 5:28:39
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Rodney Reynolds was the creator of *Renaissance Magazine*, *New Visions*, and *Today's Black Father*. In 1992, he founded *Minority Business* magazine, which focused on business in the Cleveland, Ohio area. While seeking funding to expand his business to the national level, Reynolds had the opportunity to propose a black history publication to Forbes Media. He signed the deal to produce *Legacy* magazine in 1994. The first issue was released during Black History Month in 1995, and featured black aviator Eugene Bullard on the cover. Initially, Reynolds borrowed staff from the Forbes publication *American Heritage*, which was distributed alongside the first issue of *Legacy*. Shortly after launch, the name was changed to *American Legacy Magazine*. Reynolds distributed *American Legacy* across the country, focusing on the black church community to increase the magazine's circulation. Reynolds also talks about the growing interest in African American history during the 1990s, which contributed to the magazine's success.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_006, TRT: 6:30:13
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Rodney Reynolds and his family moved to New York City in 1996 to be closer to the headquarters of *American Legacy* magazine. He led a staff of thirteen employees, including editor in chief Audrey Peterson. Reynolds was involved in every step of the publishing process, including editorial, advertising, public relations, and distribution. Because *American Legacy* was a joint venture with Forbes Media, Reynolds gained access to a large circulation network, which allowed him to attract larger advertisers and more funding. At this point, Reynolds talks about *American Legacy*'s focus on African American history and education, noting the positive response from black scholars. As *American Legacy* grew into a successful magazine, Reynolds expanded the brand to television, producing episodes on little known events in black history such as the Tulsa massacre of 1921. He also created a mobile truck featuring an exhibition on African American history, which visited schools, churches, and community events.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_007, TRT: 7:20:59
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Rodney Reynolds's joint venture with Forbes Media ended following the financial crash of 2008. As the new sole owner of *American Legacy*, Reynolds's company struggled to raise capital for the *American Legacy Network Corporation*. Eventually, he pivoted *American Legacy* from a physical magazine to an online brand, which distributed information on black history through social media and email newsletters. *American Legacy* also developed curricula and other educational resources for schools. Around the time of the interview, Reynolds created *American Legacy*'s "Know Your History" Board Game, which he planned to distribute to large retailers. Reynolds talks about his hopes and concerns for the African American community, including the importance of knowing your history. He talks about his family, including sons Rodney Reynolds, Jr. and Richard Reynolds and wife Lillian Freeman Reynolds. Reynolds concludes this part of the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Rodney Reynolds, Section A2013_203_001_008, TRT: 8:14:58
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Rodney Reynolds narrates his photographs.