

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ed Bullins

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bullins, Ed
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ed Bullins,
Dates:	April 21, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:18:03).
Abstract:	Playwright Ed Bullins (1935 - 2021) began his professional playwriting career in 1965 with the production of, "How Do You Do," "Dialect Determinism (or The Rally)," and, "Clara's Ole Man," at the Firehouse Repertory Theatre in San Francisco. He later became the Resident Playwright and Associate Director at Robert Macbeth's New Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, New York, where he headed the Black Theatre Workshop. Bullins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 21, 2005, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_106
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Award-winning playwright Ed Bullins has been a force in American theater for more than thirty-five years. Born on July 2, 1935 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Bullins attended Philadelphia public schools before he dropped out of Benjamin Franklin High School because he found it unchallenging. After joining the U.S. Navy in 1952, he won a lightweight boxing championship and started self-study through correspondence courses. In 1989, he earned his B.A. degree in English and playwriting from Antioch University in San Francisco, California. Bullins then received his M.F.A. degree from San Francisco State University in 1994.

In 1958, Bullins moves to Los Angeles, earned his general education diploma, and attended Los Angeles City College. Moving to San Francisco in 1964, Bullins entered a college writing program. In 1965, his plays *How Do You Do*, *Dialect Determinism* and *Clara's Ole Man* were staged at the Firehouse Repertory Theatre in San Francisco. With poet Amiri Baraka, Bobby Seale, Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, Bullins founded the cultural and political organization Black House and worked as its cultural director. Later, he served as minister of culture for the Black Panther Party.

In 1967, Bullins started his six-year association with Robert McBeth's New Lafayette Theatre in New York City and he became its playwright-in-residence. Also the editor of *Black Theatre* magazine, Bullins wrote and produced many plays during his time at the Lafayette.

Winner of the 1968 Vernon Rice Drama Desk Award for plays performed at the American Place Theatre in New York, Bullins also won the 1971 Obie Award for distinguished playwriting and the Black Arts Alliance Award for his plays *The Fabulous Miss Marie* and *In New England Winter*. Bullins earned Guggenheim Fellowships for playwriting in 1971 and 1976 and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the

Arts. In 1995, Bullins was appointed as a professor of theater and a distinguished artist-in-residence at Northeastern University.

Bullins passed away on November 13, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ed Bullins was conducted by Robert Hayden on April 21, 2005, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Playwright Ed Bullins (1935 - 2021) began his professional playwriting career in 1965 with the production of, "How Do You Do," "Dialect Determinism (or The Rally)," and, "Clara's Ole Man," at the Firehouse Repertory Theatre in San Francisco. He later became the Resident Playwright and Associate Director at Robert Macbeth's New Lafayette Theatre in Harlem, New York, where he headed the Black Theatre Workshop.

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:

Bullins, Ed

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bullins, Ed--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Playwright

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Ed Bullins, April 21, 2005. 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 Ed Bullins, Section A2005_106_001_001, TRT: 0:30:09 ?
Ed Bullins was born on July 2, 1935 in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to

Bertha Marie Queen Bullins. Bullins knew very little about his father. During his childhood in Philadelphia, Bullins' mother worked as a seamstress at the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps. Bullins stayed with his Aunt Bea while his mother was in temporary housing. After she found a place in North Philadelphia, Bullins returned to living with his mother. Some of his summers were spent on a farm in Denton, Maryland that belonged to a relative of his stepfather, William Carrol. In his free time, Bullins enjoyed biking, reading and spending time with neighborhood friends. After attending several integrated grade schools, he entered Benjamin Franklin High School but left before graduating because he did not feel challenged. Bullins worked as a delivery boy until he joined the U.S. Navy. After training at Bainbridge, Maryland, he served for three years on destroyer ships. Traveling and reading while at sea reawakened his interest in learning.

Video Oral History Interview with Ed Bullins, Section A2005_106_001_002, TRT: 0:30:21 ?

Ed Bullins completed correspondence courses in reading, English and electronics and won a fleet boxing championship during his time in the U.S. Navy. After his discharge, Bullins returned to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and continued his education, taking classes at William Penn Business Institute and Temple High School on the Temple University campus. Feeling stymied in Philadelphia and inspired by the Beat Movement, Bullins moved to Los Angeles, California where he spent his days earning a G.E.D. degree at Los Angeles City Community College while working nights. After discovering his passion for writing, Bullins founded the college's literary magazine, Citadel. Around the time of the Watts riot in 1965, he moved to San Francisco, California and joined its art scene, opening Black Arts/West Theater with Marvin X. As a budding writer, Bullins was influenced by HistoryMaker Maulana Karenga, among others. At a party one evening, he was inspired to write 'How Do You Do,' and discovered his calling for playwriting.

Video Oral History Interview with Ed Bullins, Section A2005_106_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Ed Bullins' first play, 'How Do You Do,' was performed at the Firehouse Repertory Theater in San Francisco, California in 1965. Bullins' involvement with the Black Arts Movement led him to found the community organization Black House with Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale. Upon moving to New York City, Bullins served as resident playwright for New Lafayette Theatre in Harlem and editor of Black Theatre Magazine. Bullins next worked for the New York Shakespeare Festival while several of his plays, including 'The Taking of Miss Janie' and 'In New England Winter,' were performed off-Broadway. His writing received many awards, including Obies and a New York Drama Critic's Circle Award. After returning to San Francisco, Bullins completed his B.A. degree at Antioch University West in 1989 and his M.F.A. from San Francisco State University in 1994. He reflects upon the characterization of his early works and describes his play, 'The Mystery of Phillis Wheatley: An Historical Play for Young Americans.'

Video Oral History Interview with Ed Bullins, Section A2005_106_001_004, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Ed Bullins moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 1995 after accepting a professorship in the theater department at Northeastern University. While teaching, he remained involved with theater, writing 'Black Caesar' and 'Sugar Hill Diva,' co-producing Shirley Timmreck's 'Circles of Time' for The Lyric Stage Company of Boston and joining ACT Roxbury Consortium. Bullins mentored playwrights at Cherry Lane Theatre in Greenwich Village, New York City and served as a judge at the Last Frontier Theatre Conference in Valdez, Alaska. His 'Storyville: A Jazzy Musical of Old New Orleans,' was performed

at Galveston Island Outdoor Musicals during the summer of 2004 in Galveston, Texas. Bullins reflects on his play 'Boy X Man' and his decision to publish 'We Righteous Bombers' under the pseudonym Kingsley B. Bass, Jr. He describes his presentation on the work of Philip Hayes Dean at a Paul Robeson Conference at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, his friendship with author James Baldwin and his writing studio in Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Ed Bullins, Section A2005_106_001_005, TRT: 0:18:28 ?

Ed Bullins was the subject of Samuel A. Hayes' 1997 'Ed Bullins: A Literary Biography.' Since that publication, Hayes has expressed interest in curating Bullins' archival material, and Bullins has presented at Hayes' annual Paul Robeson Conferences. In this part of the interview, Bullins reflects on his life and his legacy, which he believes will be his children and his writing. In the future, he hopes to create a few more plays and possibly venture into filmmaking. In describing his hopes and concerns for the African American community, he shares advice for aspiring young authors. Bullins concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered and narrating his photographs.