

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Reeves, Kenneth E., 1951-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves,
Dates:	April 6, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:05).
Abstract:	Mayor The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves (1951 -) served as mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1992 to 1995 and from 2006 to 2008. He is the first African American and the first openly gay person elected mayor of any city in Massachusetts, and the first openly gay African American mayor in U.S. history. Reeves was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 6, 2006, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_065
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mayor Kenneth Errol Reeves was born on February 8, 1951, in Detroit, Michigan. Reeves attended Detroit's public schools and graduated from Cass Technical High School in 1968. After one year at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, Reeves headed to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to attend Harvard University where he earned his degree in American history and literature in 1973. In 1976, Reeves graduated from the University of Michigan Law School.

As an attorney, Reeves served as the managing attorney for General Motors/United Auto Workers legal plan in Detroit. At the National Consumer Law Center in Boston, Reeves specialized in utility, insurance and banking regulations before running for a position on the Cambridge City Council. In 1989, Reeves was in private law practice in Cambridge.

Reeves became the first African American and the first openly gay person elected mayor of any city in Massachusetts. He is also the first openly gay African American mayor in U.S. history. Reeves served as the mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1992 to 1995 (two terms) and was reelected to the mayoral seat for 2006 to 2008. Reeves was first elected to the council in 1990 and has served eight consecutive terms of two years each.

During his first four years as mayor, Reeves launched a number of initiatives that helped to transform the physical, educational, social, and cultural landscape of the City of Cambridge. As mayor and councilman, he focused on building consensus among varied interests, focusing his efforts on preserving affordable housing, fostering citizen empowerment, stimulating economic development and encouraging ethnic and gender diversity. As chairperson of the Cambridge School Committee, he launched the Task Force on the Potential of Students and the Commission on the High School of the 21st Century.

Reeves established the city's first Office of Tourism and a commission to give voice and platform to the new immigrants in Cambridge. He led new educational and youth development efforts and fostered historical and cultural programs and activities.

Reeves has served in leadership positions with local, statewide and national organizations including Men of Color Against AIDS; the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum; the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles, California; the Cambridge Men of Color Health Task Force; and the National Black Justice Coalition in New York City.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves was conducted by Robert Hayden on April 6, 2006, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mayor The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves (1951 -) served as mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1992 to 1995 and from 2006 to 2008. He is the first African American and the first openly gay person elected mayor of any city in Massachusetts, and the first openly gay African American mayor in U.S. history.

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:

Reeves, Kenneth E., 1951-

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Reeves, Kenneth E., 1951- --Interviews

African American mayors--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews

African American gays--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews

Gay politicians--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Cambridge (Mass.)

Occupations:

Mayor

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, April 6, 2006.
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 The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, Section
A2006_065_001_001, TRT: 0:30:42 ?

The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves was born on February 8, 1951 in Detroit, Michigan. His mother, Carol Sibyl Anita Morrison, was born in Mandeville, Jamaica in 1913. Morrison trained as a nurse in Jamaica and immigrated to New York City as an adult. There, she worked as a registered nurse in Montefiore and Harlem Hospitals before reuniting with her father, Archibald Robert Morrison, who lived in Detroit, Michigan. In Detroit, she worked as a private duty nurse. Archibald Robert Morrison emigrated from Jamaica in 1914; he fought in World War I and then settled in Detroit where he eventually owned a block of real estate in the Black Bottom neighborhood. Reeves' father, George Luellen Reeves, was born of Jamaican parentage in Costa Rica, and immigrated to Detroit in the 1940s. He worked for the Greyhound Bus Company, while saving to purchase a house in Jamaica. Reeves talks about his half-siblings, his godparents and the death of his father in West Palm Beach, Florida.

African American mayors--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews.

African American gays--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews.

Gay politicians--Massachusetts--Cambridge--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, Section
A2006_065_001_002, TRT: 0:30:38 ?

The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves was raised in a two-flat his mother owned in Detroit, Michigan during the 1950s and 1960s. He describes his earliest childhood memories, Grace Episcopal Church, his godmother's garden and the history of Detroit's black middle class, including Barthwell Drugs, formerly the largest black-owned pharmacy chain in the United States. Reeves recalls the influence of Motown on Detroit's culture; the Supremes bought houses in his godparents' neighborhood; and how Detroit's black elite looked down upon the nouveau rich such as HistoryMaker Berry Gordy. Reeves explains how the Twelfth Street Riots in 1967 devastated his neighborhood and the black community, and precipitated "white flight" to the suburbs. Reeves attended Cass Technical Preparatory High School as a performing arts major where he learned a lot about modern dance and how his debate skills later served him well in his career in politics. Reeves talks about his brothers and their children.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, Section
A2006_065_001_003, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves decided to become a lawyer after another boy from his church was racially profiled and arrested by the police. Reeves attended Cass Technical High School in Detroit, Michigan, which had an ethnically diverse student body. He describes his social life during high school and the thesis he wrote on the Black Power Movement. His freshman year, Reeves attended Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, then transferred to Harvard

University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He talks about his undergraduate experience at Harvard, the emergence of the Afro-American Studies department, his relationship with Ewart Guinier, the first chair of the department, and the 1972 student takeover of Massachusetts Hall protesting Harvard's investment in South Africa. While at Harvard, Reeves was one of the original Kuumba Singers and was in the Harvard College Glee Club. Reeves talks about his sexual identity and the nation's first same-sex marriage, which took place in Cambridge.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, Section A2006_065_001_004, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves describes the history of the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College and the contributions Ewart Guinier made to the Harvard University Afro-American Studies department. Reeves talks briefly about Cornel West's tenure at Harvard and taking a class with C.L.R. James. Reeves majored in American History and Literature and wrote his thesis on the politics of W.E.B Du Bois. At Harvard, Reeves lived near Du Bois' former residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Upon graduation from Harvard, Reeves received the Michael Clark Rockefeller Fellowship to do anthropological research in Europe, West Africa, and North Africa on African mythology, dance, and mask-making. He describes his research in Europe, Morocco, and in Cote D'Ivoire, and talks about his connection to Felix-Houphouet-Boigny, the first president of Cote D'Ivoire.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves, Section A2006_065_001_005, TRT: 0:25:09 ?

The Honorable Kenneth E. Reeves did research in Europe, West Africa and North Africa in African mythology, dance and mask-making funded by the Michael Clarke Rockefeller Fellowship. He was admitted to the University of Michigan Law School in Ann Arbor in 1973. He graduated in 1976, returned to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and was recruited by the National Consumer Law Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Reeves describes his tenure at the National Consumer Law Center, his recruitment to the United Auto Workers as general counsel managing attorney, and his experience as managing attorney. Reeves first became involved in politics through his apartment building's tenant association. During the 1980s, the major issue in Cambridge politics was rent control. Reeves first ran for office in 1985 and was elected mayor for the first time in 1992. Reeves talks about his relationship with Federal District Court Judge Reginald Lindsay, and the tenure of former Cambridge mayors Leonard and Sheila Russell.