

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Rosetta Miller-Perry

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Miller-Perry, Rosetta, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 18, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:13:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper publisher Rosetta Miller-Perry (1934 - ) served as a clerk typist, then as a field representative for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. She was also Nashville Director of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She went on to become publisher of the Tennessee Tribune. Miller-Perry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 18, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_096
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Multi-talented *Tennessee Tribune* publisher and civil rights activist, Rosetta Miller-Perry was born Rosetta Irvin on July 7, 1934 in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. The steel mills attracted her parents, Anderson Irvin and Mary Hall Irvin to Coraopolis from New Orleans, Louisiana. Miller-Perry grew up near the Allegheny River where she spent her first four years on her aunt's house boat. She attended McKinley Elementary School and Coraopolis Junior High School. A good student, who read the *Pittsburgh Courier* and played the organ for her church, Miller-Perry graduated from Coraopolis Senior High School in 1952. Accepted by Howard University, Miller-Perry was disappointed when a close relative spent her tuition money. Moving to Chicago, she attended Herzl Community College and Cortes Peters Typing School while working for Spiegel's. Perry joined the United States Navy in 1954, where she worked for Adam Bush in the Pentagon and for the Adjutant General's Office in Germany.

Miller-Perry completed her B.S. degree in chemistry from the University of Memphis in 1956 and her D.M.S. from the John A. Gumpston School of Mortuary Science in 1957. In 1958, she attended Tennessee State University and then Meharry Medical College for nurses training as she worked for Southern Funeral Home. Actively involved in the civil rights struggle, Miller-Perry worked closely with Z. Alexander Looby, Curley McGruder, Reverend Kelly Miller Smith and other leaders. When Looby's home was bombed by the Ku Klux Klan in 1960, Miller-Perry moved to Memphis. She worked closely with SCLC and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She was brought into the United States Civil Rights Commission (USCRC) in 1960 as a clerk typist, then as a field representative. Assigned to cover the Memphis Garbage Strike in 1968, Miller-Perry witnessed the suspicious activities of the FBI, "The Invaders" and the chaos after the murder of Dr. King. Assigned to the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1975, Perry became Nashville Area Director of the EEOC. She retired from government service in 1990.

Miller-Perry founded Perry and Perry Associates in 1990 and published *Contemporaria*, a Tennessee-focused African

American magazine. In 1992, Perry founded the community-oriented *Tennessee Tribune* in order to focus on issues like health, education, and voter registration. She established the Greater Nashville Black Chamber of Commerce (GNBCC) in 1998. That same year, Miller-Perry created the Anthony J. Cebrun Journalism Center in partnership with Dell Computers to prepare young people for careers in journalism. In 2006, she published the names of registered voters in the predominantly black districts, who did not vote and increased voter turnout from 35% to 65%. A civic dynamo, Miller-Perry serves on numerous boards. The Rosetta I. Miller Scholarship at Memphis State University was created in her honor and the annual \$1,000 Rosetta Miller-Perry Award for Best Film by a Black Filmmaker is presented at the Nashville Film Festival.

Miller-Perry was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 18, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 18, 2007, in Nashville, Tennessee, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Newspaper publisher Rosetta Miller-Perry (1934 - ) served as a clerk typist, then as a field representative for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. She was also Nashville Director of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. She went on to become publisher of the *Tennessee Tribune*.

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Miller-Perry, Rosetta, 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Miller-Perry, Rosetta, 1934- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Newspaper Publishing Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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## 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 Rosetta Miller-Perry, March 18, 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 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry was born on July 7, 1934 in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania to Mary Hall Irvin and Anderson Irvin. Her parents were both born in New Orleans, Louisiana to former slaves. Her mother's family later moved to Hughes, Arkansas, where her grandmother worked as a domestic, and her grandfather picked cotton. Miller-Perry's father was also raised in Hughes, where most of his family were fieldworkers, and his older brother owned a successful store. Miller-Perry's parents both graduated from high school, and married after the death of her father's first wife, a Sioux woman. Her parents then moved to Coraopolis, where her father worked at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, and her mother became a maid. Miller-Perry was one of nine children; and, as a toddler, lived with her maternal aunt, who was childless. She attended McKinley Elementary School, Coraopolis Junior High School and Coraopolis High School, where she and her black peers worked as domestics for a white classmate's family.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry attended Mount Olive Baptist Church in Coraopolis, Pennsylvania, where she played the organ, and her mother, Mary Hall Irvin, often cooked for the pastor. Her father, Anderson Irvin, worked at a hardware store and a steel mill, where he was a union member. Her parents also subscribed to the Pittsburgh Courier and The Coraopolis Record. Miller-Perry aspired to become a mortician; and, upon graduating from high school, was accepted to Howard University. However, her mother mispent her tuition money, and Miller-Perry could not attend. Instead, she joined her older sister in Chicago, Illinois, and studied at Theodore Herzl Junior College and Cortez W. Peters Business College. Then, Miller-Perry joined the U.S. Navy, where she became a clerk at the Pentagon, and met her first husband. After marrying, they moved to his station in Germany, and had children. In 1958, Miller-Perry returned to the United States to attend Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:36 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where she attended Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University for one year, and then transferred to Meharry Medical College to train as a nurse. She was on campus when the Ku Klux Klan bombed the home of Z. Alexander Looby, a civil rights attorney in Nashville. Miller-Perry then became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and marched with activists John Lewis and Diane Nash. When the nursing school closed, Miller-Perry enrolled in the John A. Gupton School of Mortuary Science, where her high grades prompted death threats from her peers. Upon graduating, Miller-Perry moved to Memphis, Tennessee to work at the Southern Funeral Home; and, after a few years, enrolled at Memphis State University. Later, the Rosetta I. Miller Award Fund, which provided scholarships to single parents, was established in her honor. Miller-Perry also served on the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_004, TRT:

0:28:24 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry worked for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, first as a clerk, and later as a field representative. At the time, she lived in Memphis, Tennessee, where the primary civil rights issues were housing discrimination and police brutality. Outside of work, Miller-Perry was active in Memphis' Civil Rights Movement, and recruited her sorors from the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority to participate as well. In 1968, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Memphis to support the striking black sanitation workers. The strike was also backed by the Invaders, a local civil rights group that came under investigation by the FBI. After Miller-Perry was accused by FBI agents of colluding with the Invaders to orchestrate a riot, she began to suspect that some Invaders were federal spies. During this time, Miller-Perry stayed in the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. King was residing at the time of his assassination. She talks about the possibility of federal involvement in his murder.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry reported on the Poor People's Campaign as a field representative for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, where she served for ten years. In 1975, Miller-Perry transitioned to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), where she witnessed a decrease in class action casework under President Ronald Wilson Reagan. From 1988 to 1991, she worked under EEOC Chairman Clarence Thomas, who once prevented Miller-Perry's wrongful termination by a supervisor who wanted to install his friend in her position. Miller-Perry began her publishing career in 1990 with the founding of Contempora magazine, and established The Tennessee Tribune newspaper the following year. In the newspaper, Miller-Perry once published the names of those who failed to vote in local elections, in order to increase voter turnout. The measure was successful, but attracted criticism. Additionally, Miller-Perry talks about the relationship between black-owned publications and civil rights organizations like the NAACP.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry founded The Tennessee Tribune, a weekly newspaper that published articles on politics, health and entertainment, in 1991. In the late 1990s, her newspaper covered the scandal surrounding Reverend Henry Lyons, who was accused of misappropriating funds from the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. The Tennessee Tribune's advertising partners included Publix Super Markets, Inc. and Harris Teeter Supermarkets, Inc., as well as healthcare company owner Anthony J. Cebrun. In his honor, Miller-Perry established the Anthony J. Cebrun Journalism Center, which held summer journalism programs in Nashville, Tennessee. There, Miller-Perry often allowed community organizations to use the office space of The Tennessee Tribune. She also established the Rosetta Miller-Perry Award for Best Black Filmmaker at the Nashville Film Festival. Miller-Perry reflects upon her life, her plans for retirement and her concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Rosetta Miller-Perry, Section A2007\_096\_001\_007, TRT: 0:17:55 ?

Rosetta Miller-Perry was the publisher of The Tennessee Tribune, a weekly newspaper based in Nashville, Tennessee. The publication focused on positive stories about Nashville's black community, to balance the white press' frequent negative portrayals of African Americans. Miller-Perry also established a student internship program at The Tennessee Tribune. The program's alumni

included Justin McFarland, who became a television sportscaster in Huntsville, Alabama. Miller-Perry talks about the influence of Christianity in Nashville. She also reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered; and describes her family, including her husband, physician Ludwald Orren Pettipher Perry. Miller-Perry concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.