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African American Oral History Collection AA-MS0029

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Special Collections

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Business Number: 207-780-4269
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URL: <https://usm.maine.edu/library/specialcollections>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Special Collections
Creator:	University of Southern Maine. Center for the Study of Lives.
Creator:	Cournoyer, Jill, 1957-
Title:	African American Oral History Collection
ID:	AA-MS0029
Date [inclusive]:	1985-1996
Physical Description:	0.25 Linear Feet (1 Box)
Language of the Material:	English.
Abstract:	The Center for the Study of Lives was established in 1988 by Robert Atkinson, professor emeritus of human development, multicultural studies, and religious studies at University of Southern Maine. Collection includes recordings and documents related to oral histories conducted by Jill Cournoyer and other students of Joseph Conforti. Interviewees are Eugene Cummings, Rev. Margaret Lawson, Ronald S. Lynch, Leola Marshall, Dana Richardson, and Gerald E. Talbot. Also includes a speech by Eugene Jackson. Interviewees speak about their lives and histories as African Americans in the United States, particularly in Portland, Maine.

Preferred Citation

AA-MS0029, African American Oral History Collection, African American Collection, Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, Special Collections, University of Southern Maine.

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Biographical / Historical

The Center for the Study of Lives was established in 1988 by Robert Atkinson, professor emeritus of human development, multicultural studies, and religious studies at University of

Southern Maine. It was later known as The Life Story Commons at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and is now known as StoryCommons. The Center was dedicated to celebrating individual lives by bringing people of all generations and cultures together to share life stories, and providing a rich repository for those interested in understanding communities through autobiography, oral history, and personal reflection. According to their website, accessed in 2023, the Life Story Commons separated from the University to become StoryCommons, which was "founded upon the belief that every person has an important story to tell about the life they have lived. Stories shared between multigenerational and multicultural groups become teaching tools ... [this] helps us to recognize that we are all members of the human family."

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Scope and Contents

Collection includes audio recordings of both interviews and speeches, release forms, indexes, and transcripts. Each interview or speech is recorded on one cassette tape, except for the Gerald Talbot interview, which is divided into two tapes. The oral histories were conducted by Jill Cournoyer and other students of Joseph Conforti, Professor of American and New England Studies.

Interviewees speak about their lives and histories as African Americans in the United States, particularly in Portland, Maine, and discuss their experiences with childhood and family, education, employment, military service, community, discrimination, migration from the southern states, activism, social turbulence, racism, religion, and recreation.

There are indexes and signed releases for Gerald Talbot's and Leola Marshall's interviews, and an index of Eugene Jackson's speech. There is also a release form and index for a 1985 interview with Ronald S. Lynch, and an index for a 1995 interview with Eugene Cummings, but the audio for both interviews is not found in this collection.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Materials in this collection are the physical property of the University of Southern Maine Libraries. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the creator, or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult Special Collections staff.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Center for the Study of Lives, Gift, 2011

Custodial History

Robert Atkinson transferred ownership of the interviews to the African American Collection when they were found in a filing cabinet in Special Collections in 2011 with an undated note from Joseph Conforti which expressed his intention to give them to Special Collections.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Portland (Me.) -- History
- African Americans -- Maine -- Portland
- University of Southern Maine. Center for the Study of Lives.
- Cournoyer, Jill, 1957-
- Talbot, Gerald E., 1931- -- Oral History
- Jackson, Eugene B., 1923-2015 -- Oral History
- Marshall, Leola -- Oral History
- Lawson, Margaret D., 1929-2017 -- Oral History
- Richardson, Dana Cylar, -2000 -- Oral History
- Cummings, Eugene
- Lynch, Ronald S.

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Leola Marshall Interview , 1996-03-13 Content Warning: abortion, body shaming, medical content, misinformation, offensive language, racial slurs. Marshall discusses her experience working at a medical clinic that provided abortion procedures.	box 1	folder 1
Gerry Talbot Interview, 1996-02-29	box 1	folder 2
Gene Jackson Speech USM, 1996-02-09	box 1	folder 3
Rev. Margaret Lawson, 1996-02-16	box 1	folder 4
Dana Richardson, approximately 1996	box 1	folder 5
Oral History Releases, Catalog Sheets and Indexes, 1985, 1995, 1996	box 1	folder 6