

# **Alex Rivera Photojournalism Exhibition Coming to the NCCU Art Museum**

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An exhibition of the photographs and articles of Alexander "Alex" Rivera, Jr., nationally acclaimed photojournalist, will go on display February 7 through April 23, 2010, at the North Carolina Central University Art Museum.

"It is difficult to imagine celebrating the university's centennial without considering the artistry of Alex Rivera. Not only did he chronicle the early days of the university in pictures, but he was the first publicist for the university," said Kenneth Rodgers, director of the NCCU Art Museum.

The exhibition, "Alexander 'Alex' Rivera: Pioneer Photojournalist for Black America" includes early photographs of North Carolina College, photographs taken during the civil rights movement and photographs of celebrities who visited Durham, including tennis great Arthur Ashe, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshal, and singer Marion Anderson.

John Hope Franklin wrote that "Alex Rivera is an outstanding photo-journalist whose role in reporting World War II and the Civil Rights Movement is one of the stellar performances of the last half century. To his task he brought intelligence, sensitivity, and courage. He reported marches, protests, intimidations by authorities, and actions and reprisals by the enemies of justice. At home and abroad, in peace and in war the dramatic and intelligent images that Rivera produced have nudged this nation a bit closer to justice. For his courage and for his vision those who are the beneficiaries of his work will be ever grateful."

Rivera, the oldest child of three born to Alexander M. Rivera, Sr., grew up in Greensboro, N.C. His father, a practicing dentist, was deeply involved with leaders of the NAACP and their crusade against injustice and segregation. During his childhood and teen-age years, Rivera was exposed to the struggles for justice and equality for the African-American people. He attended Greensboro public schools and graduated from James B. Dudley High School. He enrolled in Howard University and during his freshman year worked part-time for the Washington Tribune, the largest black owned printing business in Washington D.C.

The founder and first president of what is now North Carolina Central University, Dr. James E. Shepard, invited Rivera to organize the institution's first news bureau in 1939, while working toward his Baccalaureate degree. In addition to publicizing the N.C. College, Rivera publicized Durham news and activities in the National Negro Press. He captured the financial and civic organizations, both photographically and editorially including the early years of the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs. After graduating from North Carolina College in 1941, Rivera took a position with the Norfolk Journal and Guide in Norfolk, Virginia.

Rivera completed World War II military service in Naval Intelligence from 1941 to 1945. After his military service, he returned to the journalism profession as a reporter for the

Norfolk Journal and Guide and the Pittsburgh Courier. He investigated the last lynchings in South Carolina and in Georgia, risking his life traveling through communities inflamed with racial conflict and violence. One time, he had to pass himself off as a chauffeur to escape a dangerous encounter.

As a reporter, Rivera covered a number of the lawsuits that ultimately led to the Brown v. The Topeka Board of Education decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954, that struck down the concept of "separate but equal" educational facilities. Rivera served with Attorney and later Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in the Clarendon County South Carolina case from beginning to the end. Clarendon was one of the five cases combined by the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education ruling. After this landmark decision ended legal school segregation, Rivera and Pittsburgh Courier News Editor Robert M. Ratcliffe initiated the series "The South Speaks," which chronicled the political climate and public reactions across the South. In 1955, Rivera and Ratcliffe received a Global News Syndicate Award for their coverage of the Brown decision and its impact on desegregation in public schools.

Rivera also kept North Carolinians in the headlines as the southeastern correspondent at the Pittsburgh Courier. He followed the efforts of five African-American students to integrate the law school at UNC-Chapel Hill. His articles attracted support for their efforts, and in 1951, the first blacks, Harvey Beech and Kenneth Lee, were admitted.

He was the first black journalist to participate regularly in North Carolina Governors' press conferences. He was admitted to regular coverage during the term of Governor Kerr Scott. In 1957, Vice President Richard M. Nixon invited Rivera to accompany him on an historic trip to the continent of Africa. This trip was extended to Europe and included an audience with the Pope.

Rivera knew and advised each of the Presidents and Chancellors of his alma mater during his tenure, from Dr. Shepard, the founder, to former Chancellor, James H. Ammons. He was a director of public relations for five NCCU Chancellors: Dr. Albert N. Whitting, Dr. Leroy T. Walker, Dr. Tyronza R. Richmond, Dr. Donna J. Benson, and briefly, Dr. Julius L. Chambers. Upon his retirement in 1993, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., conferred on Rivera the State of North Carolina's prestigious award, The Order of the Long Leaf Pine. Rivera died in October 2008.