

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable D'Army Bailey

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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>	Bailey, D'Army, 1941-2015
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 29, 2010 and June 24, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003 and 2010
<b>Physical Description:</b>	14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:42:15).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Circuit court judge The Honorable D'Army Bailey (1941 - 2015 ) founded the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Bailey was a Circuit Court Judge in Tennessee's 30th Judicial District and wrote the book "Mine Eyes Have Seen: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Final Journey." Bailey also made appearances as an actor in movies such as, "Mystery Train," and, "The People Vs. Larry Flint." Bailey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 29, 2010 and June 24, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_141
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Activist, politician, attorney, writer, columnist, public servant and jurist D'Army Bailey was born on November 11, 1941 in Memphis, Tennessee. He attended Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, but was expelled from Southern University in Baton Rouge in the early 1960s for participating in anti-segregation demonstrations. He went on to receive his B.A. from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and graduated from Yale Law School in 1967.

After graduation, Bailey served as national director of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council in New York from 1967 to 1968 and then as staff attorney to the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation from 1968 to 1970. From 1970 to 1971, he was program adviser to the Field Foundation in New York. Elected to the City Council in Berkeley, California, in 1971, he was ousted in a recall election after two years because of his controversial black nationalist politics. Bailey returned to his hometown of Memphis and practiced law from 1974 to 1990. In 1983, he began his fight to preserve the Lorraine Motel, the site of Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. Finally, after years of fundraising, Bailey's vision was realized in 1991 when the Lorraine Motel building was restored and transformed into the National Civil Rights Museum.

Bailey became a jurist in 1990, when he was elected Circuit Court Judge in Tennessee's 30th Judicial District. Reelected in 1998, Judge Bailey continued to devote himself to fight for civil rights. Bailey was an author, guest speaker for universities and civic organizations, and had been seen in the films "The People vs. Larry Flynt," "How Stella Got Her Groove Back" and "Mystery Train."

Bailey passed away on July 12, 2015 at age 73.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 29, 2010 and June 24, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Circuit court judge The Honorable D'Army Bailey (1941 - 2015 ) founded the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Bailey was a Circuit Court Judge in Tennessee's 30th Judicial District and wrote the book "Mine Eyes Have Seen: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Final Journey." Bailey also made appearances as an actor in movies such as, "Mystery Train," and, "The People Vs. Larry Flint."

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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:

Bailey, D'Army, 1941-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bailey, D'Army, 1941-2015--Interviews

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Museum directors--Tennessee--Memphis--Interviews

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## African American judges--Tennessee--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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Tennessee

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### Occupations:

Circuit Court Judge

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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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 The Honorable D'Army Bailey, July 29, 2010 and June 24, 2003. 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 The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_001,  
TRT: 0:28:50 ?

D'Army Bailey describes his family background. Bailey was born to Walter Lee and Will Ella Bailey on November 29, 1941. Walter Lee Bailey's family was from LaGrange, Tennessee. Born in 1925 to Lorena Robinson, Will Ella Bailey was one of four children. Walter Lee and Will Ella Bailey met as students at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee. They both dropped out and married after Will Ella Bailey became pregnant around 1940. Will Ella Bailey later received her GED, and worked as a maid in a white doctor's office. She went on to attend school to become a barber, and worked as one of the first African American female barbers in Memphis. She later returned to school to become a licensed practical nurse. During his childhood, Bailey was exposed to African American history and current events by working as a delivery boy at People's Drugstore in Memphis, where he read publications like Ebony Magazine. In 1946, Bailey's grandfather enrolled him in the private, all-black Rosebud Elementary School.

African American families--Tennessee--Memphis.

Education, Secondary--Tennessee--Memphis.

African Americans--Employment--Tennessee--Memphis.

Private schools--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American judges--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:29:45 ?

D'Army Bailey's father, Walter Lee Bailey, Sr., was born in 1920 in Holly Spring, Mississippi. He later relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, and enrolled at Booker T. Washington High School, where he met Will Ella Robinson. The couple became pregnant, and dropped out of high school and married before giving birth to HistoryMaker Walter Lee Bailey, Jr. As a youth, D'Army Bailey focused on the present, and rarely spoke with his parents about their family history. Walter Lee Bailey, Sr., worked in construction with his father, Albert Bailey, and as a mail handler on the Illinois Central Railroad. Bailey, Sr. was promoted to the position of railroad porter in the 1950s, allowing his family to travel across the United States for free. Segregation had no apparent effect on D'Army Bailey, as his South Memphis community had quality schools, grocery stores, and movie theaters. In 1955, he enrolled at Booker T. Washington High School. Bailey was an average student, and was influenced by his stern English teacher.

African American fathers--Tennessee--Memphis.

Illinois Central Railroad Company.

Campanella, Roy, 1921-1993.

Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972.

African Americans--Housing--Tennessee--Memphis.

African Americans--Segregation--Tennessee--Memphis.

Memphis (Tenn.)--Race relations.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:29:10 ?

D'Army Bailey was punished for passing a sex book around his classroom that a classmate had given him at Rosebud Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Bailey felt that his teacher, Mrs. Rulack, overreacted to the incident due to her conservative, upper-class values. In 1955, Bailey enrolled at Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, Tennessee, where his sense of self-worth was reinforced by his principal, Blair T. Hunt. Bailey also viewed his father, a doctor he worked for, and his high school history teacher, as his role models. Bailey was involved with the Shelby Count Democratic Club, as well, where he helped recruit and interview non-segregationist white politicians. Because he was surrounded by black professionals and a thriving community, Bailey did not take issue with segregation as a youth. His views changed after he enrolled at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1959, when a group of students was arrested for spearheading a sit-in.

Education, Secondary--Tennessee--Memphis.

Civil right movements--Tennessee--Memphis.

Southern University and A & M College.

Voter registration--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American lawyers--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American college students--Political activity--North Carolina--Greensboro.

Civil rights demonstrations--North Carolina--Greensboro.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

D'Army Bailey attended the United States National Student Association (NSA) Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1960. During this conference, many southern schools spoke out against the endorsement of the Civil Rights Movement by NSA leader Curtis Gans. In 1961, Bailey marched on downtown Baton Rouge to protest the arrests of Southern University Students, which were provoked by a sit-in. After the march erupted in violence and many of the march's leaders were arrested, Bailey addressed the crowd of battered student protesters to calm them. After this experience, Bailey became a vocal and active participant in the student movement at Southern University. Bailey was advised by the university's Dean of Men to subdue his involvement, but refused, and was expelled from the school. Professor Adolph Reed, Sr. was the only of Bailey's instructors to speak out on his behalf, and he was fired as a result. In 1962, Bailey enrolled at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts upon receiving a scholarship to the school.

Southern University and A & M College.

Civil right movements--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

African American college students--Political activity--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

Civil rights demonstrations--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

Education, Higher--Worcester--Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

In 1963, D'Army Bailey invited Malcom X to speak on the campus of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Bailey also became acquainted with activist Abbie Hoffman. Bailey graduated from Clark University with his B.A. degree in 1964, and then enrolled at Boston University Law School. In the summer of 1965, Bailey interned for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and then transferred to Yale Law School. In the summer of 1966, he worked with the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council and was hired as the National Director after graduating with his J.D. degree in 1967. In 1968, Bailey went on to work

for the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation. In 1970, Bailey demanded the resignation of the foundation's director, but was subsequently fired by the new director. Bailey later befriended a white couple who paid him to administer their trust fund. In 1971, Bailey was hired as a program advisor for the Field Foundation, and began serving as Chairman of the Board for Berkeley Legal Services.

African American lawyers--California--San Francisco.

Constitutional law--United States--Cases.

Education, Higher--Worcester--Massachusetts.

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

X, Malcolm, 1925-1965.

Hoffman, Abbie.

Alinsky, Saul David, 1909-1972.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

D'Army Bailey describes California's San Francisco Bay area as politically conservative though nearly a quarter of the area's population was black in the early 1970s. In 1971, Bailey and his friend Ira decided to run for two of four seats on the Berkeley City Council following Ron Dellums' election to the U.S. Congress. The men were not active in the community, but decided to proposition the Berkeley Black Caucus and the Black Panthers for support. The Caucus initially refused to support the men, but reconsidered because of the financial resources Bailey had due to his white benefactors. Bailey and Ira ran on ticket with the radical April Coalition aiming to have two blacks, one woman, and one student elected to the City Council. Bailey, Ira, and one woman won three seats on the Berkeley City Council; the student lost to a conservative white man. Upon his election, Bailey came under heavy scrutiny for employing a large personal staff, and receiving anonymous donations from his East Coast benefactors.

Berkeley (Calif.).

Discrimination in housing--California--Berkeley.

April Coalition.

City council members--California--Berkeley.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_001\_007, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

D'Army Bailey fell out with the Berkeley Black Caucus after he was elected to the Berkeley City Council in 1971, as he refused to support their full platform. Thus, Bailey turned to strategic agitation to leverage his power on the Berkeley City Council. Bailey focused on issues centered on Berkeley's African American community, and this led to opposition from both African American conservatives and radical groups. However, Bailey managed to get affirmative action and childcare programs passed, and successfully negotiated a sanitation workers strike as a City of Berkeley Councilman. Bailey considered Wilmont Sweeney, Vice Mayor of the City of Berkeley, an "Uncle Tom," and often mocked and agitated him in public. In 1973, Sweeney and white conservatives led efforts to recall Bailey from his city council seat. Myrlie Evers, and HistoryMakers Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Julian Bond spoke out in support of Bailey, but his seat was successfully recalled.

Berkeley (Calif.).

City council members--California--Berkeley.

African Americans--Politics and government--California--Berkeley.

Sanitation workers--California--Berkeley.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_008,  
TRT: 0:30:19 ?

D'Army Bailey talked about his 1960s student activism. In 1973, Bailey lost his seat on the Berkeley City Council after a recall election. With little community support, and a tense relationship with Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton, Bailey chose to move back to his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee in 1974. He entered private practice with his brother, HistoryMaker Walter Lee Bailey, Jr. Bailey and got married. Bailey was viewed as either a "fiery" radical or as a poised, respectful attorney upon his return to Memphis. Thus, he chose to write an op-ed column for "The Commercial Appeal" and host a monthly television show to balance out his image. In 1974, Bailey began working part-time as a public defender in the Shelby County Juvenile Court. He was transferred to adult court in 1978 when he spoke out against corrupt judges in his op-ed column. In 1980, Bailey lost a bid to be appointed as Chief Public Defender in Shelby County, but was subsequently appointed to the Shelby County capital punishment defense team.

African American judges--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American families--Tennessee--Memphis.

African American children--Tennessee--Memphis.

Southern University and A & M College.

Civil right movements--Louisiana--Baton Rouge.

Newton, Huey P.

Commercial appeal (Memphis, Tenn.).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_009,  
TRT: 0:31:08 ?

In 1980, D'Army Bailey was appointed to serve on the Shelby County capital punishment defense team. As a defense attorney, Bailey sought to diminish the prosecution's case, and keep his clients off of death row. In the mid-1980s, Bailey defended Sidney Porterfield, who was hired by Gaile Owens to kill her husband. Porterfield was the only of Bailey's clients that was sentenced to death. As a capital defense attorney, Bailey faced the most difficulty when selecting juries. He also served on the Board of Commissioners for Memphis Gas, Light, and Water from 1987-1983. In the late 1970s, Bailey met Walter Bailey, owner of the Lorraine motel, who shared the same last name but was not related. The rundown motel had previously been overlooked in Memphis' business district before the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bailey worked with Walter Bailey to create a nonprofit to raise money for the motel and tried to convince investors and developers to purchase and renovate the site, to no avail. Memphis (Tenn.).

Confidential communications--Lawyers--United States.

Capital punishment--United States.

Discrimination in criminal justice administration--United States.

Museums--Tennessee--Memphis.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

National Civil Rights Museum.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_010,  
TRT: 0:32:17 ?

D'Army Bailey talks about the Lorraine Motel facing closure in the late 1970s. The motel contained a shrine dedicated to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Loree Bailey, wife of motel owner Walter Bailey. Around 1980, D'Army Bailey incorporated the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation in order to raise funds to save the Lorraine Motel. Memphis' WDIA-FM lent their support to Bailey's efforts, and contracted with Walter Bailey to purchase the Lorraine Motel. D'Army Bailey worked with WDIA to produce a radio-a-thon to raise funds for the purchase, but the event flopped. The Lorraine Motel was foreclosed on in 1982, but with the help of local leaders and his affiliates, Bailey raised \$144,000 to purchase the motel. Walter Bailey continued to operate the motel while D'Army Bailey entered into talks to transform the motel into a museum. To this end, Bailey raised \$9 million with support from the Tennessee State Legislature, the City of Memphis, and Shelby County in 1987.

National Civil Rights Museum.

Museums--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_011, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

According to D'Army Bailey, Coretta Scott King did not support the development of the National Civil Rights Museum, and was paid \$15,000 to attend the 1991 opening of the museum. In the late 1980s, the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation transferred the title of the Lorraine Motel to the State of Tennessee. The motel was then closed, and longtime tenant Jacqueline Smith was forcibly removed. She has protested the National Civil Rights Museum ever since. According to Bailey, members of the board of the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation were absent early on, but demanded to be a part of the decision making process as the National Civil Rights Museum was developed. In 1991, board members agreed to vote Bailey out of his position as board chairman, and replace him with HistoryMaker Benjamin Hooks. In response, Bailey resigned in 1992. Bailey commented on his distaste for Pitt Hyde, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Civil Rights Museum, and the museum's corporate sponsors

National Civil Rights Museum.

Museums--Tennessee--Memphis.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Civil right movements--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_012, TRT: 0:32:33 ?

In 1990, D'Army Bailey was elected as a Tennessee Circuit Court judge where he heard civil cases, including a number of divorce cases. Bailey was not favorable of divorce attorneys who drew out their cases to capitalize on their lawyer fees. However, Bailey was generally known as a fair judge, and had a philosophy of making his courtroom fair. In 1999, Bailey presided over the "Big Tobacco" case, in which Phillip Morris, Brown and Williamson and R. J. Reynolds were sued for the wrongful deaths of three smokers, respectively. Each of the tobacco companies was acquitted. In 2007, Bailey attempted to win a nomination to the Tennessee Supreme Court. Though he was one of three final candidates, Bailey lost his bid, and later learned that he was blackballed by Memphis leaders including HistoryMaker Maxine Smith. Bailey retired as a Tennessee Circuit Court judge in 2009. Bailey also talked about the film projector he owned as a child.

African American judges--Tennessee--Memphis.

African Americans--Employment--Tennessee--Memphis.

Amateur films--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_013,  
TRT: 0:27:42 ?

D'Army Bailey was offered a role as a conservative politician in a Stacy Keach film while living in Berkeley, California in the 1970s, which he declined. In 1989 in Memphis, Tennessee, Bailey met a casting agent at a nightclub, who later invited him to audition for a Jim Jarmusch film, resulting in his first role in the film "Mystery Train." Around 1991, Bailey met film producer Michael Hausman through Danny Glover, who was visiting the National Civil Rights Museum prior to its opening. Hausman returned to Memphis in 1996, and invited Bailey to meet film director Milos Forman, who was shooting "The People vs. Larry Flynt." Forman later cast Bailey as a judge in the film. In 1998, Bailey was cast as a minister in "How Stella Got Her Groove Back." Bailey acted in over ten films and wrote two books. Bailey talked about his family and his short battle with lung cancer. Bailey also reflected on his legacy, what he would have done differently in life, and how he would like to be remembered.

African Americans--Employment.

African American actors--United States.

African American families--Tennessee--Memphis.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable D'Army Bailey, Section A2003\_141\_002\_014,  
TRT: 0:10:50 ?

D'Army Bailey narrates his photographs.