

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William "Bob" Bailey

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bailey, William H., 1927-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey,
Dates:	April 5, 2007 and November 2, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:15:16).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and entertainer William "Bob" Bailey (1927 - 2014) hosted <i>Talk of the Town</i> , the first television program in Nevada entirely produced, directed and featuring African American talent. He also advocated for the desegregation of Nevada's gaming industry. Bailey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 5, 2007 and November 2, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_124
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. William H. "Bob" Bailey was born on February 14, 1927, in Detroit, Michigan, to a family with a strong musical tradition; vocal star Pearl Bailey was Bailey's second cousin, and Pearl's brother, Bill, was a professional dancer and singer before her. When Bailey's father lost his job during the Great Depression, the family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Bailey grew up and learned to sing in church choirs. Bailey finished high school at age sixteen with the intention to become an international lawyer; his grades and vocal talent had won him a scholarship to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Bailey worked his way through college by performing in a local night club. During one of these performances, he was approached by bandleader Benny Goodman, and John Hammond, a sponsor of Count Basie. After auditioning while on Christmas break, Bailey was hired by Basie himself. Bailey left Morehouse College while studying business law to be a featured singer in Count Basie's band.

In 1950, Bailey enrolled in the School of Radio and Television in New York and attended specialized studies at the Columbia Theater Wing. Bailey was later offered a position at the Moulin Rouge Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas as a co-producer and Master of Ceremonies, eventually landing him a job as the host of a variety show called *Talk of the Town* on CBS affiliate, KLAS Channel 8. *Talk of the Town* was the first show in the nation to be entirely produced, starred in, and directed by black talent; he was the producer and director of the show. From 1965 to 1971, Bailey was a newscaster and variety show host for ABC affiliate, Channel 13 in Las Vegas.

Bailey became known as a civil rights pioneer in Las Vegas entertainment and broadcasting due to his role in the desegregation of the State of Nevada his night club, Sugar Hill, and other businesses employed over 100 African Americans. Bailey later began Manpower Services, which trained 1,000 African Americans to work in gaming and related businesses.

In 1989, Bailey became national deputy director of the Minority Business Development Agency, U.S. Department of Commerce. Bailey was a member of the first graduating class of the Institute of Minority Business Education at Howard University School of Business; he was an outspoken advocate for minority small business and self-sufficiency for nearly a half century. In 2006, a middle school in Las Vegas was named after Bailey for his contributions to community building and education both in the state of Nevada, and nationwide.

Bailey was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 5, 2007 and November 2, 2007.

Bailey passed away on May 24, 2014 at age 87.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William "Bob" Bailey was conducted by Denise Gines and Jacques Lesure on April 5, 2007 and November 2, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and entertainer William "Bob" Bailey (1927 - 2014) hosted Talk of the Town, the first television program in Nevada entirely produced, directed and featuring African American talent. He also advocated for the desegregation of Nevada's gaming industry.

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:

Bailey, William H., 1927-2014

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Bailey, William H., 1927-2014 --Interviews

African American television personalities--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American singers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Entertainment Promoter

HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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 William "Bob" Bailey, April 5, 2007 and November 2, 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).

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 William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_001_001, TRT: 0:28:18 ?

William "Bob" Bailey was born on February 14, 1927 in Detroit, Michigan to Margaret Bailey and John Bailey. Bailey's mother was born in Birmingham, Alabama; while Bailey's father was the son of a mixed race woman in Cedartown, Georgia. There, Bailey's father and maternal aunt met while working for the same family. Bailey's aunt introduced his parents; and, soon after, they married and settled in Birmingham, Alabama. Wanting to leave the South, his father obtained a position at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, where Bailey was born. A few years later, the Ford Motor Company began laying off workers, and Bailey's family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where several extended family members lived. In Cleveland, Bailey's father worked for a dairy and the Telling Belle Vernon Company, and as a maintenance man at the family's apartment building. In the mid-1930s, Bailey moved with his family to the Outhwaite Homes, a newly opened public housing development in Cleveland.

African American television personalities--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American singers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_001_002, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

William "Bob" Bailey grew up in the Outhwaite Homes, the first public housing development built in Cleveland, Ohio. There, the community was close-knit, and Bailey spent the summers playing sports and participating in programs at the Portland Outhwaite Recreation Center. The housing development was surrounded by a number of black-owned businesses, including several number running operations. Bailey attended Cleveland's all-black Bolton Elementary School and Kennard Junior High School. He excelled academically, and participated in the student government as well as the glee club and choir. He went on to attend Cleveland's Central High School, where he experienced integrated education for the first time. He focused on his interest in music, and studied opera and classical genres. All of Bailey's relatives were musically inclined, and sang together in the choir at East Mount Zion Baptist Church. Upon graduation, Bailey matriculated at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he received a music scholarship.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_001_003, TRT: 0:28:52 ?

William "Bob" Bailey received a music scholarship to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. Influenced by his high school counselor and college president Benjamin Mays, he aspired to become an international lawyer. He also

continued pursuing his musical talents. He sang in the college glee club alongside his classmate, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and performed at the local nightclubs on the weekends to earn spending money. During his sophomore year, Bailey was approached after a performance by music promoters Benny Goodman and John Hammond, who offered him a role as a vocalist in Count Basie's band. He flew to New York City to audition; and, despite the disapproval of his father, John Bailey, left school to sing with the band. After arriving in New York City, Bailey received guidance from Count Basie, who continued to serve as his mentor while the band toured the Chitlin' Circuit in the late 1940s.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_004, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

William "Bob" Bailey matriculated at Morehouse College in the mid-1940s, and left school to join Count Basie's band. They performed for African American and white audiences throughout the United States, and were often denied entry to restaurants and hotels in the South. Bailey toured with the band for three years; and, during that time, received guidance from Count Basie about finances, relationships and the danger of drugs. During this era, there were numerous jazz bands touring the United States, including those led by Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie. However, by the 1950s, nightclubs and theaters began closing due to changes in the music industry; and, without venues, many of the big bands dissolved, including that of Count Basie. Bailey completed a sixteen week engagement as a solo vocalist at Small's Paradise in New York City, and was once again contacted by promoter John Hammond, who invited him to audition for a production of 'Sugar Hill' at the Las Palmas Theatre in Los Angeles, California.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_005, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

William "Bob" Bailey met his wife, dancer Anna Bailey, while singing with Count Basie's band in New York City. In 1952, Bailey performed in 'Sugar Hill' in Los Angeles, California; and then returned to New York City, where he briefly worked as the master of ceremonies at Club 845, before joining the cast of 'Phil Moore's Flock' at La Vie en Rose. Around this time, Bailey enrolled in production courses at the School of Radio and Television. After graduating, he made several attempts to enter the television industry, but was unable to find a job due to the industry's discriminatory practices. Returning to show business, he produced and performed in Clarence Robinson's 'Tropi Can Can' revue in New York City. In 1955, Bailey moved the show to the newly built Moulin Rouge Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The venue was the first integrated hotel and casino in Las Vegas, where strict segregation laws barred African American entertainers from performing outside West Las Vegas.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_006, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

William "Bob" Bailey produced and performed in the 'Tropi Can Can' revue at the Moulin Rouge Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. The show also included performances by Benny Carter and Hines, Hines and Dad. During the show's run, Bailey and his fellow performer, Alice Key, approached KLAS-TV owner Hank Greenspun about producing a television show to promote attendance at the hotel. He accepted their proposal; and, in 1955, Bailey became the producer and co-host of 'Talk of the Town,' the first all-black television show in the country. Shortly after, he was offered a program on KENO Radio. However, six months after the opening of the Moulin Rouge Hotel, the casino was forced to close, and

the 'Tropi Can Can' revue was cancelled. Bailey continued performing in Las Vegas' nightclubs, and produced his television and radio shows with support from the African American business community. Bailey also became involved in Las Vegas' politics, and befriended civil rights leaders Charles West and James B. McMillan.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_007, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

William "Bob" Bailey moved to Las Vegas, Nevada as an entertainer, and became involved in the city's politics and civil rights activism. In 1956, he was appointed as chairman of the Urban Renewal Advisory Commission. He also continued to produce and host his television show, 'Talk of the Town,' which moved to KTNV-TV in 1957. Then, in 1959, Bailey changed his political affiliation to the Democratic Party in order to work on Grant Sawyer's gubernatorial campaign. After Sawyer won the election, Bailey left Las Vegas to manage the yearlong road show of his cousin, singer Pearl Bailey. At the end of her tour, Bailey returned to Las Vegas, and began planning a protest march against the city's segregated hotels and casinos. Fearing the impact of march on their businesses, the hotel and casino owners agreed to integrate. In 1961, Bailey returned to the broadcasting industry at KLAS-TV, and opened the Sugar Hill nightclub. He also purchased the Golden West Shopping Center, where he built the Pan-Afro Auditorium.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_008, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

William "Bob" Bailey opened the Pan-Afro Auditorium in the Golden West Shopping Center in Las Vegas, Nevada to provide a meeting space for the city's African American organizations. However, he was unable to finance the shopping center, and was forced to sell it. From 1965 to 1971, Bailey worked as an anchor at KTNV-TV, and studied real estate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. As a real estate broker, Bailey became more involved with the city's black-owned business community, and learned of the newly formed Office of Minority Business Enterprise. Through the office, Bailey attended an eight week training course at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then established the Nevada Economic Development Company in 1972. He also founded several other organizations, including Manpower Services and a telecommunications school. In 1991, Bailey was appointed by President George Herbert Walker Bush as the director of the Minority Business Development Agency.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Bob" Bailey, Section A2007_124_002_009, TRT: 0:24:13 ?

William "Bob" Bailey was appointed as the director of the Minority Business Development Agency by President George Herbert Walker Bush in 1991. During his four-year tenure, Bailey lived in Washington, D.C., while his wife and children remained in Las Vegas, Nevada to run the newly opened Baby Grand Nightclub. During the Gulf War, Bailey travelled to the Middle East with other minority businessmen, and secured \$30 million worth of contracts with U.S. allies in the region. Bailey left the directorship in 1994, and returned to Las Vegas. He then accepted the presidency of the National Association of Minority Businesses, and held that position for several years until the excessive travel forced him to step down. In 1999, a school in Las Vegas was renamed the William H. Bailey Middle School in his honor. Bailey describes his hopes for the African American community, and his advice for future generations. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.