

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bobby William Austin

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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>	Austin, Bobby William
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 5, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:45:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Foundation executive Bobby William Austin (1944 - ) is the founder of the Village Foundation, established to mentor young African American men. Austin has been recognized for his work, with listings in Who's Who in Black America and Outstanding Young Men of America, among others. Austin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 5, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_119
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Foundation executive Bobby William Austin was born in Jonesville, Kentucky on December 29, 1944. His father, Herschel, worked as a porter on the L&N Railroad, and his mother, Mary, was a homemaker. His mother also instilled in him a passion that would remain with Austin throughout his life: literature. As a child, he would receive books for Christmas instead of toys, and he would carry them everywhere with him. After graduating from the High Street High School in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Austin went on to attend Western Kentucky University, also in Bowling Green, earning his B.A. degree in economics and sociology in 1966. From there, he attended Fisk University, earning his master's degree in sociology in 1968 and then went on to earn his Ph.D. from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in 1972.

After completing his doctoral studies, Austin relocated to Washington, D.C., where he became involved with a number of organizations. He was the founder and editor of the *Urban League Review*, and he also served as a partner with Austin Ford Associates, a Washington, D.C. based consulting firm. Following these positions, Austin became an executive assistant to the president of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), and later served as an assistant to the UDC Board of Trustees and the late Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown. He has also worked as a speechwriter for former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris and the former mayor of Washington, D.C. Sharon Pratt Kelly. From 1986 until 1998, Austin was the program director for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

In 1997, Austin founded the Village Foundation, an organization dedicated to "repairing the breach" between African American males and the rest of society. Its mission is to engage African American young men and boys in American society, by reconnecting them first to their local communities and then to the larger society. One of the leading initiatives of the Village Foundation today is the Give a Boy a Book Day campaign. This program is designed to encourage reading and literacy in young African American men. He continues to serve there as the

president and CEO.

Austin is active in a number of areas in addition to his work with the Village Foundation. He serves as the Mohatma M.K. Gandhi Fellow of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and he serves on the boards of the National Housing Trust and the National Institute for Urban Wildlife. He is also the co-author of *Repairing the Breach* with Andrew Young. Austin is also listed in *Who's Who in Black America*, *Outstanding Young Men of America* and *Men of Achievement* among others.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bobby William Austin was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 5, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Foundation executive Bobby William Austin (1944 - ) is the founder of the Village Foundation, established to mentor young African American men. Austin has been recognized for his work, with listings in *Who's Who in Black America* and *Outstanding Young Men of America*, among others.

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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:

Austin, Bobby William

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Austin, Bobby William--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:

Foundation Executive

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Bobby William Austin, August 5, 2004. 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 Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Bobby William Austin, born on December 29, 1944, talks about his family history and his childhood in Jonesville, Kentucky. Austin can trace his family history to his great-great grandparents on both sides of his family. His mother, Mary Anderson, was born in 1917 in Simpson County, Kentucky and moved to Woodburn, Kentucky as a child. She was not allowed to go past the eighth grade, which Austin believes spurred her commitment to her children's education. Austin's father, Herschel Harold Austin, was born in 1914 in Woodburn, a small farming community. Austin describes how his parents met. His paternal great-grandmother, Amanda Wormley was a mulatto woman and her son, John William Austin, was the child of a white man named Mr. Bluitt, though he took the surname of Wormley's husband (Austin). Austin describes meeting a white woman descended from the same Bluitts as an adult. He talks about his older brother, Herschel, and his memories of their childhood in Jonesville, Kentucky.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Bobby William Austin talks about his childhood in Jonesville, Kentucky. He can only recall one negative memory, in which a student pushed him and his mother off the sidewalk. As a child, Austin received piano lessons at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky and also played the drums. He attended Delafield Elementary School in Warren County, Kentucky, where classes were separated by whether students were from the city or the county. There, he grew fascinated with ancient history. Austin recalls how dark it was in the rural countryside of Jonesville in his childhood and his desire to move to the city. His segregated high school, High Street High School in Bowling Green, also separated city and country students. He recalls an influential English teacher as well as his activities as a high school student including music, drama, writing, and student council. After graduating in 1962, Austin enrolled at Western Kentucky University where he battled loneliness and joined Alpha Phi Omega Fraternity.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:41 ?

Bobby William Austin talks about his experiences in higher education. Although he did not enjoy his time at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky as a student, he later grew fond of the institution. After graduating in 1966, Austin earned his M.A. degree in sociology from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee in 1968. He recalls notable professors and visitors at Fisk, including Dr. Jitsuichi Masuoka, Abdul Alkalimat, and Stokely Carmichael. Austin also recalls the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. He went to study at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada where he was mentored by Howard Brotz. After earning his Ph.D. in sociology in 1972, he returned to the U.S., teaching at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. before joining the National Urban League. Austin then worked for the National Endowment for the Humanities before becoming the Board of Higher Education's policy director in charge of consolidating Washington, D.C.'s postsecondary schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Bobby William Austin served as a vice president for the University of the

District of Columbia in Washington, D.C. in the early 1980s. He was also a speechwriter for figures like HistoryMaker Sharon Pratt Kelly, before receiving a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Leadership Network Fellowship in 1985. After his son was racially profiled as a gang member in Battle Creek, Michigan, Austin funded programs targeting leadership development among African American boys and men using grant money from the Kellogg Foundation. His fellow collaborators included HistoryMakers Haki Madhubuti, Lerone Bennett, and Ramona Edelin. He also co-authored “Repairing the Breach” with HistoryMaker Andrew Young. Austin’s Kellogg fellowship led to the creation of the National Task Force on African American Men and Boys in 1996. He then founded the Village Foundation in 1997 with the support of the Kellogg Foundation. Austin also talks about his book, ‘The End of Race,’ the difference between race and ethnicity, and black stereotypes.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_005, TRT: 0:22:52 ?

Bobby William Austin talks about the purpose of his book, ‘The End of Race.’ Through his organization, the Village Foundation, Austin worked to build a different social infrastructure for young black men and their peers. Austin talks about the connection between geography and cultural identity as well as social stratification through racial classification. Austin describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also reflects on his life, his family, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby William Austin, Section A2004\_119\_001\_006, TRT: 0:19:56 ?

Bobby William Austin narrates his photographs.