

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Barry A. Mayo

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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>	Mayo, Barry A., 1952-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 7, 1999
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	1999
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:42).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Broadcast entrepreneur and radio program director Barry A. Mayo (1952 - ) is a broadcasting management pioneer. Mayo was a radio programmer throughout the United States before he got his big break being hired by one the largest urban stations in the country, WRKS-FM (KISS-FM) in New York. Mayo is known for mixing musical genres including jazz, R&B, funk and soul, which has since become an industry standard. Mayo was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 7, 1999, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A1999_002
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

A passionate music lover, Barry Mayo's early inspirations were the jazz and R&B albums his father played each evening on the family record player. Mayo has taken this love for African American music and shaped it into a broadcasting career of unprecedented success. His first exposure to the industry came during the 1970s while attending the School of Communications at Howard University.

Mayo became the first general manager of WHBC, a position that rocketed him into a radio industry career.

Over a span of twenty years, Mayo served as program director in numerous markets across the nation, including Nashville, Tennessee; Norfolk, Virginia; and Little Rock, Arkansas. During this time, he exhibited a passion for music and marketing skill, which earned him several awards. More important, Mayo created a mix of musical genres and styles that has since become an industry standard because of its upbeat blend of jazz, R&B, funk and soul. In doing so, Mayo continued to reengineer the formats of stations in Chicago, New York and Detroit, bringing them and others to number one in their markets.

Mayo's reputation as an innovative radio programmer spread quickly throughout the industry and he was offered a position at one of the largest urban stations in the country, WRKS-FM (KISS-FM) in New York. Three years after joining the programming staff at KISS-FM, Mayo became vice president and general manager of this station. His place in the radio industry firmly set, Mayo decided to leave the station and become an entrepreneur. In 1988, he and a group of partners founded Broadcast Partners. Originally a five-station network, Broadcast Partners grew under Mayo's guidance into a twelve-station, publicly traded company with stations in Dallas, New York, Chicago and Charlotte. In 1995, Mayo sold his share of Broadcast Partners and founded Mayomedia, a media consulting firm specializing in urban markets.

In 1995, Mayo received the Entrepreneur of the Year Award from the National Black Programmers' Coalition and in 1996 received the Martin Luther King Legacy Award from the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago. Mayo is currently exploring a career as a photographer while spearheading the creation of the National Jazz Museum.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Barry A. Mayo was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on December 7, 1999, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast entrepreneur and radio program director Barry A. Mayo (1952 - ) is a broadcasting management pioneer. Mayo was a radio programmer throughout the United States before he got his big break being hired by one the largest urban stations in the country, WRKS-FM (KISS-FM) in New York. Mayo is known for mixing musical genres including jazz, R&B, funk and soul, which has since become an industry standard.

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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:

Mayo, Barry A., 1952-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hayes, Frank (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Mayo, Barry A., 1952---Interviews

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African American radio broadcasters--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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Broadcast Partners

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## **Occupations:**

Broadcast Entrepreneur

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Radio Program Director

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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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 Barry A. Mayo, December 7, 1999. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:06 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo's earliest memory involves birthday parties thrown in his honor. He also remembers his early affinity for music; his father played jazz and blues 45s on the family's Victrola. Mayo describes listening to music as an emotional experience. His favorite genre, jazz, is the music with which he grew up. Mayo discusses his interest in a museum project in Chicago, Illinois that would chronicle the history of jazz, an art form that he describes as improvisational and uniquely American. Mayo describes himself as having been a rambunctious child growing up in the Bronx and then Harlem, New York. He emphasizes the role of school integration in his life; he was the first black student to attend a white school in the northeast Bronx. He recalls being an engaged student who was targeted by schoolmates; ultimately, fighting a bully resulted in his comfort in his environment. His experience attending an all-white school and then returning home to a

predominantly black neighborhood contributed significantly to Mayo's interests and personality. Mayo expresses his thoughts about friendship and describes a sixth grade classmate as his closest friend. He then describes his family as particularly small, an anomaly in African American culture.

Childhood and youth--New York (State)--New York.

Music.

Jazz.

School integration--New York (State)--New York.

Education, Primary--New York (State).

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:11 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo continues to discuss his family structure; he compares his small family to the large families of his first wife and his current wife. Mayo discusses his brief time at the City College of New York and indicates that he declared an electrical engineering major, the requirements of which proved difficult. Mayo discusses a pyramid sales opportunity in which he and his parents invested. His attempts at sales success ultimately failed; Mayo found himself in a dire economic situation. Mayo made the decision to return to school at Howard University, in Washington, D.C., to become an audio engineer; he went to school full-time and worked to pay his tuition. Mayo became involved with Howard's radio station, WHBC, and ultimately became its general manager. His success in that position earned him attention; he was informed of a position with a Little Rock, Arkansas radio station by the university's dean. He left college, without graduating, to take that job. Mayo describes fellow students' retrospective impressions of him as the station's general manager. Mayo reflects on leaving school early and his ultimate decision to return twenty years later to finish his coursework. He gives an emotional explanation of what the graduation represents.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

City University of New York.

Howard University.

Radio broadcasting.

Poverty.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:18 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo discusses the importance of education; he claims that education is essential to the future successes of African Americans. Mayo discusses the power of mentoring, particularly in single-parent situations. He remembers one of his own mentors, a supervisor at an early job. Mayo describes that a pyramid sales opportunity, though not financially successful, encouraged him to aspire to success. Mayo reviews his broadcast management positions at a number of geographically disparate radio stations and reflects on his successful approach to radio programming. He considers memorable co-workers whom he met in the course of his career, and he reflects on the atypical development of his career and the concomitant challenges he faced. Mayo remembers his time working for a Chicago, Illinois radio station and describes Chicagoans' sophisticated musical tastes. He reflects on his move from Chicago back to New York and the business decisions that come along with such a change.

African Americans--Education.

Mentoring.

Radio broadcasting.

Radio stations--Illinois--Chicago.

New York (N.Y.)--Economic aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:04 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo discusses his successes at 98.7 KISS FM, the New York radio station for which he left Chicago, Illinois. He recalls a seven-year period in his career -- 1988 to 1995 -- during which he took advantage of opportunities for advancement at the radio station. His ultimate achievement in this period was becoming president of a public company. During this period, Mayo learned another important lesson, the need for balance in

one's personal and professional lives. Mayo discusses the invaluable role of radio research as well as instinct in his field. Mayo discusses the changes in the radio industry since the government's deregulation of telecommunications in 1996. He discusses the few opportunities that the consolidated industry still has available to African Americans interested in radio broadcasting. Mayo discusses his involvement in establishing Chicago's first hip-hop station, and he begins to describe the evolution of rap music.

Radio stations--New York (State)--New York.

Radio broadcasting--United States.

Telecommunication--Minority executives.

Radio--Law and legislation--United States.

Rap (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:03 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo continues to discuss the evolution of rap music. As he was present at its inception, he is able to put the music into a social context; he wonders if young people, including his children, are able to do the same. Mayo emphasizes rap's staying power. He likens rap to jazz in terms of their American origins and their improvisational nature. Mayo considers the effect that the Internet has had and will continue to have on the recording industry and its sister industry, radio broadcasting. Mayo would like to be remembered for combining business and art -- maintaining a lucrative radio station that plays good music. Barry Mayo describes plans to continue pursuing photography, with a concentration on issues of race. Mayo recalls coming up in the 1960s, dominated by figures like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. He also discusses the powerful presence and solid guidance of Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam. Mayo describes the importance of faith and determination in achieving one's personal success. Mayo then describes that while he's accomplished much with respect to his career, he has much more to learn in life.

Rap (Music).

Music--Social aspects.

Internet radio broadcasting.

Photography.

Farrakhan, Louis.

Faith.

Video Oral History Interview with Barry A. Mayo, Section  
A1999\_002\_001\_006, TRT: 1999/12/07

Radio executive Barry Mayo narrates his personal  
photographs.

Photographs.