

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hal Jackson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jackson, Hal
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson,
Dates:	March 5, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:52:37).
Abstract:	Radio personality and sports promoter Hal Jackson (1914 - 2012) was a legendary presence on New York City radio stations for his work on many programs, including Sunday Classics on WBLS, which he hosted for more than a decade. Jackson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 5, 2002, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_007
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on November 3, 1914 in Charleston, South Carolina to Eugene Baron Jackson (a tailor) and Laura Rivers Jackson, Hal Jackson became one of the most important radio personalities of all time.

When Jackson was eight, his parents died within five months of each other. After living with his sisters and other relatives, he moved out on his own in 1928 - at the age of 13. Two years later, he moved north, settling in Washington, D.C. He attended Howard University, where his interests in sports and broadcasting grew. By the late 1930s, Jackson was an announcer for Howard University and Griffith Stadium.

In 1939, Jackson approached WINX in Washington, D.C. and proposed a radio show. Management flatly refused. Undeterred, Jackson purchased airtime through a wholesale buyer of radio. He interviewed pioneering African Americans during his talk and music program, highlighting achievements of the community. His show proved so popular that, within six months, Jackson was able to buy airtime and sell ads on three additional stations in different cities! Broadcasting live from each station, Jackson worked extremely long hours.

In the early 1940s, Jackson organized the Washington Bears. This black basketball team played against white local and professional teams and finished the 1942-43 season with a record of 66-0. He also began the Good Deed Club, which donated toys, money, books, and volunteers to hospitals and others. In the spring of 1949, Jackson's television variety show premiered. At the end of that year, he moved to New York with his radio show, "The House that Jack Built." By the mid-1950s, he was again working at multiple stations. As the first African American announcer on network radio, he attracted the largest radio audience in the world at that time. Jackson continued to succeed in television as well, hosting a Sunday morning children's show, *Uncle Hal's Kids Show*.

Through the years, Jackson's civic works became legendary. He used every opportunity to improve people's lives—from busing groups of underprivileged children to the Palisades Amusement Park, to establishing a scholarship fund for Howard University. He also began Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International, a scholarship competition

that has impacted over 30,000 young women of color. Jackson used his position and popularity to agitate for civil rights and actively participated in numerous history-making events. The NAACP and the SCLC benefited from his fundraising efforts. In 1969, Jackson helped African American models gain recognition by hosting *The Miss Black America Pageant*. In 1971, Jackson and other African American entrepreneurs founded Inner City Broadcasting and bought stations all over the country.

Jackson has hosted "Sunday Classics," on New York radio station WBLS for over a decade. Jackson was the first African American inducted into the Broadcast Hall of Fame, and several U.S. Presidents have honored him with special achievement awards.

Bibliography: Jackson, Hal. *The House that Jack Built*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Hal Jackson passed away on May 23, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hal Jackson was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 5, 2002, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio personality and sports promoter Hal Jackson (1914 - 2012) was a legendary presence on New York City radio stations for his work on many programs, including Sunday Classics on WBLS, which he hosted for more than a decade.

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:

Jackson, Hal

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Jackson, Hal--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Personality

Sports Promoter

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Hal Jackson, March 5, 2002. 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 Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_001, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Hal Jackson talks about his family background. Jackson's father, Eugene Baron Jackson, was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and his mother, Laura Rivers Jackson, was born in James Island, South Carolina. Jackson was born on November 3, 1914 in Charleston, South Carolina. He has two older sisters, Esyelee and Alice, and two older brothers, Eugene and Leroy. Esyelee was the first African American student at the New England Conservatory in Boston, Massachusetts. While Jackson grew up in an upper middle class family, both of Jackson's parents passed away when Jackson was age eight in 1922, leaving all of their money to Jackson's oldest sister Esyelee, who squandered all of the money on travel. Jackson attended the Avery Normal School in Charleston, but moved to Washington, D.C. as a teenager to work and attend Dunbar High School. After graduating from high school in 1933, Jackson married Claudia Parrat and enrolled at Howard University as a non-matriculating student.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_002, TRT: 0:30:48 ?

Hal Jackson describes the beginning of his career in sports announcing, his first radio broadcast, and his championship basketball team. Jackson was mentored by sportswriter Sam Lacey, who wrote a column for the Baltimore Afro-American and let Jackson join him in the announcer's booth for Negro League Baseball. In September of 1936, Jackson's first daughter, Jane Harley, was born and he divorced Claudia Parrat. Jackson raised Jane as a single father until marrying Julia Hawkins in 1938. In 1939, Jackson gained the sponsorship of a local black restaurant owner named C.C. Coley, purchased airtime through a wholesaler, and broadcast a radio show on the Washington Post's network WINX. This first show featured his mentor Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune and Dr. Charles Drew, and led Jackson to do shows in Washington, D.C.; Annapolis, Maryland; and Baltimore, Maryland. In 1943, Jackson started the basketball team the Washington Bears and led them to winning the World Championship Tournament in Chicago, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_003, TRT: 0:30:33 ?

Hal Jackson describes his career in radio broadcasting in the 1940s and the beginning of his career on television. After Jackson's basketball team, the Washington Bears, won the World Championship in 1943, Jackson disbanded the team because Mike Uline was starting a basketball franchise in Washington and black players like Satchel Paige and Larry Doby were being hired to play for white teams. Jackson pursued his dream of becoming the first black baseball announcer for a white team, first for the New York Yankees and then for the Brooklyn Dodgers, but was unable to land a place with either team. Until 1949, Jackson worked for Richard Eaton at WOOK in Silver Spring, Maryland, where he played "race music" and organized the AFTRA union for the first time for black workers. In 1949, he started a variety show 'The House that Jack Built' for the DuMont Television Network, which broadcast live from the Howard Theatre. Jackson's television show moved to WMCA in New York under the ownership of Nathan Strauss.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_004, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

Hal Jackson describes his career in the 1950s. While hosting his television program 'The House that Jack Built' for WMCA in 1950, Jackson also hosted daily radio programs for WABC, where he broadcast jazz from Birdland, and WLIB, where he broadcast rhythm and blues. After briefly returning to Washington D.C. to work at WUST, Jackson moved to Harlem, New York and worked at WLIB under Harry Novik. In the late 1950s, Jackson's radio career was put on hold when Novik accused him of having taken bribes to pay records as part of the payola scandal. After losing his job in radio and forced to take a job as a cleaner, Jackson's payola case was dropped. In 1971, Jackson returned to WLIB when he and Manhattan Borough Chief Percy Sutton purchased the station from Novik. In 1971, Jackson also helped Howard University launch WHUR-FM.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_005, TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Hal Jackson describes his career in the 1960s. In the late 1950s, Jackson was one of many radio personalities accused of payola, or accepting pay for increased play. Other prominent hosts included Philadelphia host Douglas "Jocko" Henderson; Dick Clark; and Alan Freed, originator of the term "rock and roll." Jackson returned to radio by hosting a WQXR-FM classical music program from Philadelphia and then he returned to New York at WWRL under the ownership of Egmont Sonderling. Jackson also hosted a Sunday show at the Palisades Amusement Park in New Jersey, which featured performers such as The Rolling Stones, The Four Tops, The Supremes, Smokey Robinson, and Dionne Warwick, and where Jackson became friends with Motown Records founder Berry Gordy. In 1969, Jackson hosted Miss Black America at Madison Square Garden, where he was responsible for the first televised performance of the Jackson Five. In 1971, Jackson started the Miss Black Teenage America, which became Hal Jackson's Talented Teens International.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_006, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Hal Jackson discusses his Talented Teens International scholarship program and reflects on his career. In 1971, Jackson hosted his first Talented Teens show in Atlanta, Georgia, which helped over 30,000 young women gain college scholarships, including Michelle Thomas and Jada Pinkett. In 1971, Jackson also founded the Inner City Broadcasting Corporation with Manhattan Borough Chief Percy Sutton, and the two of them purchased WLIB in New York. The corporation was one of the first broadcasting companies wholly owned by African Americans and the first in New York, and was led by Pierre Sutton after his father's retirement in 1990. On WLIB, Jackson hosted the show 'Sunday Classics' with his wife Deborah Bolling Jackson. Jackson reflects on his legacy and the importance of the communications industry in his own life and in the African American community. Jackson ends the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_007, TRT: 0:30:19 ?

Hal Jackson continues to narrate his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Hal Jackson, Section A2002_007_001_008, TRT: 0:20:48 ?

Hal Jackson continues to narrate his photographs.