

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ronald Gilbert Baker

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Baker, Ronald Gilbert
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker,
Dates:	August 9, 2004 and June 22, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	10 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:54:02).
Abstract:	Photographer Ronald Gilbert Baker (1949 -) has photographed hundreds of celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders. He self-published a book of his work, Solid Images, in 1994. Baker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 9, 2004 and June 22, 2004, in Largo, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_089
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Photographer Ronald Gilbert Baker was born on June 4, 1949 in Washington, D.C. He and his twin brother, Donald, were adopted as infants by Bernice and Oscar Baker. His mother was a government worker and his father also worked for the government and operated a watch repair business. He was educated in Washington, D.C. public schools and developed a love for orchestrated music in elementary school. In 1963, while a student at Kramer Junior High School, Baker bought his first camera and embarked on his photography career. As a way to “pick up” girls he became the official lunchtime fashion photographer for all of

his female classmates. Baker received his high school diploma from Anacostia High School in 1967.

After graduation, Baker worked as a clerk in the Public Affairs office of the Navy Department until 1971. Still grieving over the death of his mother and father, who had died within six months of one another in 1969, Baker and his twin were drafted into the military. From 1971 through 1973, Baker served in the army and was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Shortly after his honorable discharge from the army and return to the Navy Department, he decided to enroll in Federal City College, now known as the University of the District of Columbia.

He entered the UDC in 1976, majoring in cinematography, photography and mass media. From 1976 through 1994 Baker worked at C and P Telephone Company while still pursuing his photography career. In 1975, Baker published his first photo in *The Afro* newspaper, a picture of “Miss Black D.C.” In April of 1976, Baker’s career as a celebrity photographer began. He was hired to spend the day photographing musician and Grammy Award winner Van McCoy. Days later Baker was hired by boxing promoter Don King to shoot Muhammad Ali. These two events led to hundreds of assignments with celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders.

In 1979, Baker self published his first book, *Solid Images*. His portfolio includes photographs of Michael Jackson, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Bryant Gumbel, Colin Powell and Dick Gregory, to name a few. He and wife reside in Largo, Maryland, where he continues to capture priceless images of celebrities. He and his twin brother, also a photographer, are currently working on a book highlighting their work.

Baker was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 22, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 9, 2004 and June 22, 2004, in Largo, Maryland, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Ronald Gilbert Baker (1949 -) has photographed hundreds of celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders. He self-published a book of his work, *Solid Images*, in 1994.

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:

Baker, Ronald Gilbert

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Photographer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Ronald Gilbert Baker, August 9, 2004 and June 22, 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 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following

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 Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section A2004_089_002_001, TRT: 0:30:26 2004/08/09

Ronald Gilbert Baker was born on June 4, 1949 in Washington, D.C. His mother, Bernice Brown Baker, was born in 1915 in Georgia. She moved to D.C. as a young adult and worked at the post office. His father, Oscar Baker, was born in 1917 in Virginia. He worked as a watch repairman and a supervisor in the U.S. Post Office. Bernice Brown Baker could not have children due to a childhood accident, so the Bakers adopted Ronald and his identical twin brother, HistoryMaker Donald Baker, in 1949. Baker also lived with his grandmother Sarah Fagins, who was doting and stern. The Baker twins were often dressed alike by their parents, but had such different personalities that few ever confused them. Baker grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in D.C., and enjoyed shows like 'The Ed Sullivan Show' and 'Amos 'n' Andy.' He was an extroverted child who enjoyed playing pranks on friends. Oscar Baker was a partier and likely a womanizer, and sometimes would bring his sons along with him and his friends when they went on sprees.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section A2004_089_002_002, TRT: 0:31:04 2004/08/09

Ronald Gilbert Baker attended Benning Elementary School in Washington, D.C., where he developed an appreciation for classical music during field trips to DAR

Constitution Hall. He and his twin brother, HistoryMaker Donald Baker, were put in different classes for the first time in third grade. In fourth grade, Baker met Michel Daley, who became his childhood best friend. In elementary school, Baker aspired to work an office job like his parents. Baker's grandmother Sarah Fagins brought her grandsons to church every Sunday. When Baker was nine years old, his parents divorced, and his father became less present in his life. Baker attended Kramer Junior High School in D.C., where he first became interested in fashionable styles such as Chuck Taylors and Hawaiian shirts. During junior high school, he cared for his brother who was recovering from major surgery and had a paper route in his neighborhood. A gay couple lived in one of the houses on his paper route, which disconcerted Baker.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section A2004_089_002_003, TRT: 0:30:51 2004/08/09

Ronald Gilbert Baker bought his first camera, an Anscomatic, in 1963, with help from his mother. He began carrying his camera with him everywhere. Baker attended Anacostia Senior High School in Washington, D.C. where he met girls by offering to use them as models in his photos; and took business classes, including typing, to work toward finding an office job. He was not a great athlete or romantically successful in high school; he was even ditched by his prom date. Baker began working a summer job at the U.S. Navy Department in 1965, and was hired full time after graduating from high school. He bought his first 35 mm camera, a Mamiya, in 1967, and began to pursue photography more seriously, including learning how to develop film. Baker was deferred from the draft to care for his mother, who died after a long illness in 1969. In 1971, he was drafted into the U.S. Army, and served for two years at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Afterwards, he attended Federal City College in D.C. on the G.I. Bill.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section A2004_089_002_004, TRT: 0:31:13 2004/08/09

Ronald Gilbert Baker studied media and photography at Federal City College in Washington, D.C. through the G.I. Bill. He began working as a professional photographer

shooting weddings. In 1975, Baker's first published photograph was printed in the Baltimore Afro-American. He met Don King in 1976, when King hired him to take photos of a gala and then a boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Jimmy Young. Baker was hired as Van McCoy's personal photographer after Baker's picture of McCoy was published in Jet magazine as the Picture of the Week. Working in partnership with his brother, HistoryMaker Donald Baker, Baker later both photographed and interviewed the Jackson Five and Donna Summer. His favorite celebrity subject was Muhammad Ali, whom he photographed winking at the press during the weigh in for a 1976 bout. In 1994, Baker published 'Solid Images,' a collection of his previous nineteen years of photos. He describes his relationship with his daughter Kellee and describes how he wishes to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section A2004_089_002_005, TRT: 0:17:38 2004/08/09

Ronald Gilbert Baker had an unsatisfactory photo shoot with Linda Greene of Peaches & Herb because her makeup had not been applied correctly, which motivated him to learn how to do his subjects' makeup. He expresses his ambition to photograph Aretha Franklin and Oprah Winfrey before the end of his career. He describes the process of writing his next book with his brother, HistoryMaker Donald Baker; he hopes the book will be appreciated for the history it documents. Baker describes his lack of interest in becoming globally famous, and narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section B2004_089_001_001, TRT: 0:30:24 2004/06/22

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section B2004_089_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 2004/06/22

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section B2004_089_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 2004/06/22

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section B2004_089_001_004, TRT: 0:30:58 2004/06/22

Video Oral History Interview with Ronald Gilbert Baker, Section

B2004_089_001_004E, TRT: 0:30:58 2004/06/22