

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Donald Baker

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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>	Baker, Donald
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 22, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacam SP videocassettes (1:54:39).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Photographer Donald Baker (1949 - ) began working as a disc jockey and photographer after serving in the Army in the 1970's. In 1975, he opened his photography and videography business; his portfolio includes photographs of celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders. Baker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 22, 2004, in Fort Pendleton, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_090
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Celebrity photographer Donald Lee Baker was born on June 4, 1949 in Washington, D.C. He and his twin brother, Ronald, 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. Baker earned his high school diploma from Anacostia High School in 1967, a year after his twin brother, because he was retained in the third grade. While in high school he was a member of the chorus, drama club and Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC).

After graduation, Baker worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant and for a printing company. From 1969 through 1999 he worked for AT&T telephone company, which was later bought by Verizon. He started out in the mailroom and was quickly promoted to a service representative and later into a management position. 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 Carson, Colorado. After his honorable discharge from the army he returned to the telephone company and began working as disc jockey and photographer in his spare time.

In 1975, Baker opened his photography and videography business. He met many of his photography clients through his disc jockey assignments and would often take photos in between playing songs at various clubs and events. His portfolio includes photographs of celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders such as Gordon Parks, Howard Cosell, Stephanie Mills and Donna Summer.

Baker and his brother, also a photographer, are currently working on a book highlighting their work.

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

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Donald Baker was conducted by Hamilton, Racine Tucker on June 22, 2004, in Fort Pendleton, Maryland, and was recorded on 4 Betacam SP videocassettes. Photographer Donald Baker (1949 - ) began working as a disc jockey and photographer after serving in the Army in the 1970's. In 1975, he opened his photography and videography business; his portfolio includes photographs of celebrities, politicians and prominent business leaders.

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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:

Donald Baker

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Donald Baker--Interviews

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African American photographers--Washington (D.C.).

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African American photographers--Interviews.

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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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 Donald Baker, 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 6/19/2012 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, June 22, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004\_090\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:00  
2004/06/22

Donald Baker and his twin brother Ronald were born in 1949, and were adopted either that year or 1950. Baker's adoptive grandmother looked after them. They were very active and constantly acted out in Washington, D.C., and were punished (sometimes because of mistaken identity) either by their family or their tight knit racially mixed community. Baker's grandmother was

profoundly affected by the death of President Kennedy. At the age of fifteen, Baker nearly died from internal bleeding caused by playing football. Baker's parents divorced when he was eight but this did not affect him as greatly as it did his twin brother. Baker met Illinois Congressman William Dawson when he was ten or eleven. Baker believed he was held back a grade in school because of intra-racial prejudice.

Children of divorced parents.

Adoptees

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004\_090\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:15  
2004/06/22

Donald Baker rarely seriously considered a career well into high school but was attracted to celebrities because he wished to know what propelled them to achieve. In 1968 and 1969 when Baker's parents died and news of the day such as discrimination, the draft, and race riots entered his daily concern, he was thrust into adulthood. Baker's community in Southeast Washington, D.C. was mixed and peaceful until riots began and white neighbors feared reprisals from outsiders. He greatly admired musicians of the 1960s and his favorite teachers were the ones who spoke truthfully. Baker enlisted in the Anacostia High School JROTC and earned the rank of Major.

Children of divorced parents.

Race riots--Washington (D.C.)--1960-1970.

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004\_090\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:35  
2004/06/22

Donald Baker's interest in photography began when he and his twin brother Ronald became serious. Baker worked a variety of jobs that he rejected as careers until he was hired as a customer service representative for AT&T; he held this job while his photography career evolved. Baker and his brother were drafted in 1971 and Baker returned in 1973. In 1976 Baker accompanied his brother to a Muhammad Ali fight where he was exposed to a celebrity atmosphere.

Children of divorced parents.

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

African American disc jockeys

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004\_090\_001\_004, TRT: 0:21:49  
2004/06/22

Donald Baker loved to entertain. In 1975 he was asked to fill in for the hired disc jockey on two separate, unrelated occasions. One of these occasions gained him night employment at The Foxtrot in Washington, D.C. He frequently brought his camera because of the celebrities who came there. Baker's early 1990s photograph of Gordon Parks is his favorite celebrity image. Baker believed his own near death experience at fifteen gave him a fearlessness his brother lacked. Baker believes his parents would be proud of him. Baker believes he raised his own son very well.

Children of divorced parents.

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006