

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Baker, Donald, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker,
Dates:	June 22, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:54:39).
Abstract:	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 Washington, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_090
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Donald Baker was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on June 22, 2004, in Fort Washington, Maryland, and was recorded on 8 Betacame 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.

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, Donald, 1949-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Baker, Donald, 1949---Interviews

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

African American photographers--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 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 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 Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_001, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Donald Baker was born on June 4, 1949 in Washington, D.C. Baker and his twin brother, HistoryMaker Ronald Baker, were adopted as infants by Bernice and

Oscar Baker. They do not know anything about their birth family. Baker describes his parents and grandmother, Sarah Fagins, who lived with the family until her death in 1966. Baker describes growing up in northeast Washington, D.C., watching soap operas with his grandmother and her reaction to President John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. As a teenager, Baker sustained a serious injury while playing football. He also recalls the sights, sounds, and smells of his childhood, his earliest childhood memory, and the impact of his parents' divorce on him and his brother when they were eight years old. Baker attended Benning Elementary School and Garfield Elementary School where he was held back a grade. As boys, Baker and his brother were mischievous and enjoyed disassembling machines like transistor radios to learn how they worked. Children of divorced parents.

Adoptees

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_001E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_002, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Donald Baker talks about his childhood and adolescence in Washington, D.C. where he attended Kramer Middle School and Anacostia High School. As a child, he was mostly interested in playing and having fun. He recalls the way he and his brother, HistoryMaker Ronald Baker, were treated because they were twins and their decision to stop dressing alike. Baker was raised in an integrated area of Washington, D.C. and describes his close-knit community's response to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968. He also talks about the impact of his mother's illness on him and his brother. As a child, Baker visited Baptist and Catholic churches in Washington, D.C. with his devout grandmother. In junior high, he worked a paper route for the Washington Post and enjoyed listening to music by The Temptations, The Miracles, and Aretha Franklin. Baker talks about his experience and his teachers at Anacostia High School where he joined the ROTC and the chorus.

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_002E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_003, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

Donald Baker describes his experience at Anacostia High School in Washington, D.C. In high school, Baker became interested in photography when he realized the attention he would receive from girls. Following in the footsteps of his twin, HistoryMaker Ronald Baker, he came to take photography seriously and learned about lighting and developing film. In 1968, Baker graduated and worked as a dishwasher before he was hired at a local print shop. At the time, his mother was seriously ill, passing away in 1969. Baker describes the impact of her death and having to sell her car. Though he learned valuable skills at the print shop, he did not see his future there and soon found a job working at AT&T as a service representative. In 1971, Baker and his brother were drafted into the Vietnam War. His brother fell ill with pleurisy and Baker was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado. In 1976, Baker and his brother were hired by Don King to take photographs at the Capital Centre.

Children of divorced parents.

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

African American disc jockeys

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_003E, TRT:

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_004, TRT: 0:21:49 ?

Donald Baker talks about working as a disc jockey in Washington, D.C during the mid-1970s. He began deejaying at the Foxtrappe, a social club after another DJ left in the middle of his set. At Foxtrappe, Baker also taught the hustle and built his reputation as a photographer by documenting many of the politicians, business people and entertainers who frequented the club. He recalls encountering well-known figures such as Alex Haley, Reverend Ike, and Richard Pryor at the Foxtrappe. Baker talks about taking his favorite photograph, of photographer and HistoryMaker Gordon Parks at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in the late 1990s. He also describes his friendly competition with his twin brother, HistoryMaker Ronald Baker who was also a professional photographer. He ends by reflecting upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. Baker concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Children of divorced parents.

Multiple birth--Social aspects.

Parks, Gordon, 1912-2006

Video Oral History Interview with Donald Baker, Section B2004_090_001_004E, TRT: