



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hon. Robert Mack Bell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hon. Robert Mack Bell
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell,
Dates:	August 17, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:16:49).
Abstract:	Appellate Court Judge and lawyer Robert Mack Bell (1943 -) was the lead defendant in the 1964 civil rights case, Bell v. Maryland, which was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and helped end racial segregation in Maryland. Since 1996, Bell has been Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals. Bell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 17, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_129
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Appellate Court Judge and lawyer Robert Mack Bell was born on July 6, 1943 in Rocky Mount, North Carolina to Thomas and Rosa Lee Bell. His father was a construction worker while his mother worked as a domestic and care giver. His parents separated when he was a young, and Bell was raised by his mother who moved to Baltimore, Maryland, in search of better jobs. He attended Baltimore public schools and graduated from Dunbar High School in 1961. While finishing his senior year at Dunbar in 1960, he, along with eleven other students, were recruited by Morgan State College students to participate in a sit-in at Hooper's Restaurant, a segregated business. The students were subsequently arrested and convicted for trespassing. Bell was the lead defendant for an appeal of the verdict in the landmark civil rights case, Bell v. Maryland, which was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and eventually ended racial segregation in Maryland.

After high school, Bell enrolled at Morgan State College in 1961 but was forced to take a year off from school after being hospitalized with tuberculosis. In 1963, he returned to Morgan where he was active in student government, and a member of the honor society and of the Alpha Phi Omega Fraternity. After he graduated second in his class with his A.B. degree in history and political science in 1966, he enrolled at Harvard Law School. The first student from Morgan to attend Harvard's prestigious law school, Bell received his J.D. degree from there in 1969.

After passing the Maryland State Bar Examination in 1969, Bell was hired by Piper & Marbury, where he became the Baltimore law firm's first black associate. In 1975, he became a judge on the District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City in his first judgeship. In 1980, Bell served as a judge for the Circuit Court for Baltimore, remaining until 1984. He was then appointed to the bench of the Court of Special Appeals in Maryland, serving

in that post until 1991 when he was elected Judge of the Court of Appeals of Maryland. In 1996, Bell was appointed by Maryland Governor Parris Glendening as Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court. With that appointment he became the only active judge in Maryland to have served at least four years on all four levels of Maryland's judiciary and the first African American to be named the state's chief jurist.

Bell is a member of several legal organizations including the National, American and Maryland State Bar Associations. He has received numerous awards and recognition for his work in the legal field and lectures often at schools and at community functions.

Appellate Court Judge Robert Mack Bell was interviewed by TheHistoryMakers on August 17, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 17, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Appellate Court Judge and lawyer Robert Mack Bell (1943 -) was the lead defendant in the 1964 civil rights case, *Bell v. Maryland*, which was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court and helped end racial segregation in Maryland. Since 1996, Bell has been Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals.

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:

Bell, Robert Mack

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.

Bell, Robert Mack--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Maryland--Baltimore--Interviews.

African American judges--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Hon. Robert Mack Bell, August 17, 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 8/24/2011 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, August 17, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell, Section A2004_129_001_001, TRT: 0:30:53 2004/08/17

Hon. Robert Bell discusses his family background. His mother, Rosa Lee Jordan Bell, was born on April 18, 1918, in Halifax County, North Carolina, where she and her siblings worked as sharecroppers. His father, Thomas Bell, was born in Robson County, North Carolina, and worked as a construction laborer. Bell's parents separated when he was young, and he was raised in Baltimore, Maryland, by his mother, who was a domestic worker and care giver. Bell recalls his childhood in Baltimore Maryland. Bell recalls his neighborhood as a vibrant, economically diverse area where businesses included a barber shop, dentist's office, restaurant and several bars. Bell attended P.S. 101A Elementary School but had to fight the neighborhood bully almost daily on his way to and from school. He enjoyed the Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving holidays, and fondly recalls special holiday dishes such as sauerkraut with pigs' tails.

African American families--North Carolina.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.

Single parents--Maryland--Baltimore.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American children.

Bullies.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell, Section A2004_129_001_002, TRT: 0:31:14 2004/08/17

Hon. Robert Bell talks about his experiences at Dunbar Junior and Senior High Schools. He discusses his friendship with Reginald F. Lewis, who served on student council with Bell and involved him in his teenage entrepreneurial ventures. Bell speaks at length about his involvement in the civil rights protests that led to the landmark 1964 U.S. Supreme Court segregation case, *Bell v. Maryland*. In 1960, Morgan State College students approached him and other students to sit in at the segregated Hooper's Restaurant. The students were arrested and prosecuted for trespassing. Represented by Juanita Jackson Mitchell, Robert Watts and Tucker Dearing, the students' case eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which sent it back to the Maryland Court of Appeals for a decision. The Maryland Court of Appeals ultimately vacated the convictions since the students' actions were no longer illegal under a recently passed law.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Maryland--Baltimore.

African Americans--Civil rights.

Civil rights movements--Maryland--Baltimore.

Segregation--Law and legislation.

United States. Supreme Court.

Segregation--Maryland--Baltimore.

Morgan State College.

African American college students--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.

Lewis, Reginald F., 1942-1993.

Mitchell, Juanita Jackson, 1913-.

Watts, Robert B., 1922-.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell, Section A2004_129_001_003, TRT: 0:30:19 2004/08/17

Hon. Robert Bell continues discussing the court case Bell v. Maryland. Several of the prosecutors, including Robert Charles Murphy and Ben Burns, later sat on the Maryland Court of Appeals. He then talks about his college years at Morgan State College. After contracting tuberculosis, Bell took a year's leave of absence but kept up with his studies with the help of his history professor, Walter Fisher. A member of the honor society and the Alpha Phi Omega Fraternity, Bell graduated in 1966. At the suggestion of Paul Sarbanes, an aspiring Maryland politician, Bell applied to and was accepted at Harvard Law School where he studied under Alan Dershowitz and Reginald F. Lewis was in the class ahead of him. A member of the newly formed Black Law Student Association, Bell graduated with his J.D. degree in 1969. After passing the bar examination, he returned to Baltimore as the first black associate at Piper & Marbury.

African American college students--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American universities and colleges--Maryland--Baltimore.

Morgan State College.

Sarbanes, Paul.

Lewis, Reginald F., 1942-1993.

African American lawyers--Maryland--Baltimore.

Harvard University. Law School.

African American law students.

Dershowitz, Alan M.

Piper & Marbury.

Alpha Phi Omega.

Tuberculosis.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell, Section A2004_129_001_004, TRT: 0:30:03 2004/08/17

Hon. Robert Bell discusses his career as a lawyer and a judge. He worked at Piper & Marbury until 1975 when he left to become a judge for the District Court of Maryland. He became a judge due to pressure from state and community leaders who wanted to see more African Americans on the bench. In 1980, community leaders again pushed him to join the bench of the Baltimore City Circuit Court. He discusses some of his more memorable court cases, which usually involved youth. From 1984 to 1991, he sat on the Court of Special Appeals before moving to the Court of Appeals and becoming chief judge in 1996. He reflects on his life and hopes that he is fair judge who adheres to the law. He never imagined that the son of sharecroppers would become the head of a judicial system.

African American lawyers--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American judges--Maryland.

Circuit courts--Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Robert Mack Bell, Section A2004_129_001_005, TRT: 0:14:20 2004/08/17

Hon. Robert Bell narrates family and professional photographs.

