Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Avis T. Bailey

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Avis T. Bailey,

Dates: July 28, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:49:09).

Abstract: Nonprofit chief executive, captain, and ship pilot Avis T. Bailey (1949 - ) was the first African American officer in the SUNOCO fleet and the first African American to receive a state-issued pilot’s license. In 2004, he founded the Captain Avis T. Bailey Mariner’s Foundation to educate youth about maritime careers. Bailey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 28, 2007, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_217

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit chief executive, captain and ship pilot Avis T. Bailey was born on May 19, 1949, in Washington, D.C. to Roosevelt and Dorothy Bailey. He was raised by his mother after his parents separated when he was four years old. The youngest of eight children, Bailey was a precocious child, who learned American history through self-guided tours of Washington, D.C.’s monuments and museums. As a student at Banneker Junior High School in Washington, D.C., Bailey was selected from a citywide pool to participate in the First Scholastic Honors Program. His participation in the program continued until his graduation from Cardozo Senior High School in 1967.

Bailey was one of seven students selected from 450 applicants to compete for a military academy scholarship. Despite early dreams of becoming an astronaut, Bailey won a scholarship to the United States Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York. The Merchant Marine Academy was Bailey’s first introduction to integrated education. One of only four African Americans in a student body of 1,000, he was often the object of racist jokes and harassment. As a midshipman at the Academy, Bailey visited more than twenty-three countries and ports of call and studied three foreign languages. In 1972, Bailey earned his B.S. degree in nautical science, becoming the twentieth African American to graduate from the Merchant Marine Academy.

Upon graduation, Sun Oil Company (now SUNOCO) hired Bailey as third mate, making him the company's first African American officer. In 1979, Bailey earned his pilot’s license with the Association of Maryland Pilots and became the first African American in the nation to receive a state-issued pilot’s license. As a ship pilot, Bailey traveled thousands of miles up and down the Chesapeake Bay. He became known by colleagues as “the singing pilot,” who would belt out Johnny Mathis tunes from the helm.
In 2004, Bailey founded the Captain Avis T. Bailey Mariner’s Foundation, a non-profit organization designed to mentor inner-city youth and to educate them about maritime careers. Bailey married Tamara Allenette Durant, a former flight attendant, in 2000. He has three sons, Christopher, Jason and Jarrett Bailey, and two stepsons, Luke and Shannon Durant. Bailey retired from the Association of Maryland Pilots in 2006 after a career that spanned thirty-four years.

Captain Avis T. Bailey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 28, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Avis T. Bailey was conducted by Cheryl Butler on July 28, 2007, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive, captain, and ship pilot Avis T. Bailey (1949 - ) was the first African American officer in the SUNOCO fleet and the first African American to receive a state-issued pilot’s license. In 2004, he founded the Captain Avis T. Bailey Mariner’s Foundation to educate youth about maritime careers.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Bailey, Avis T.

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)
Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Bailey, Avis T.--Interviews.

African American ship pilots--Interviews.

African American merchant mariners--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Sunoco (Firm)

Captain Avis T. Bailey Mariner’s Foundation

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

MilitaryMakers

BusinessMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/8/2011 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, July 28, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Avis T. Bailey, Section A2007_217_001_001, TRT: 0:29:18

2007/07/28

Captain Avis Bailey shares his family history. His paternal grandfather, Gebez Hevlow, was originally from Dayton, Ohio but settled in Washington, D.C. where he met his wife, Maude, Bailey's grandmother. Bailey discusses his childhood in Washington, D.C. He recalls Hurricane Hazel in 1954 and his hiding behind a broken tree. As the youngest of eight children, he received a great deal of attention and love from his family. He describes his neighborhood, a predominantly black community with many condemned houses. By the age of eight, Bailey was a member of a neighborhood gang, the Baby Nuggets, which chased outside children off of their block. Bailey discusses his parents. Roosevelt Bailey, his father, left home when he was four but Bailey remembers him as a funny man. Bailey's mother, Dorothy, was a homemaker but became a cocktail waitress, working twelve-hour shifts, after the couple split.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).
African Americans--Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis T. Bailey, Section A2007_217_001_002, TRT: 0:28:59

2007/07/28

Captain Avis Bailey discusses his experiences with racism. Once while walking home in Washington, D.C., a police officer told him to leave an upscale, white neighborhood. Bailey then talks about his school years. He enjoyed school and was very inquisitive. He attended Cardoza Senior High School where Bennetta Washington, wife of future Washington D.C. Mayor Walter Washington, was a popular principal. Bailey describes his decision to attend a military academy. A white cadet from the Air Force Academy spoke at a career day event for high school students. Although Bailey was accepted at Colby College, Union University and Bowden University, he became interested in joining the military when he realized that it would pay for college. He enrolled at the United States Merchant Marine Academy where he was the only African American in his class and one of only four blacks in a student body of 1,000.

Racism--Washington (D.C.).
African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Washington (D.C.).
African Americans--Education (Higher).
United States Merchant Marine Academy.
Washington, Bennetta Bullock, 1917-.
Captain Avis Bailey describes his time at the United States Merchant Marine Academy. During his first year, he was uncomfortable in the predominantly white environment and was often the object of racist jokes and harassment. While some of his professors were prejudiced, other professors treated him with respect. Unhappy at school, he returned home in 1968, shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the eruption of the Washington, D.C. riots. His mother was disappointed that he had left school and urged him to continue. Bailey discusses his return to the academy. Since he did not want to disappoint his mother, he decided to re-enroll. The glee club became one of his new extracurricular activities. At the academy, Bailey spent every other half year at sea. This included a forty day period of working on a ship and traveling around the world.

African Americans--Education (Higher).
United States Merchant Marine Academy.
Nautical training-schools.
Racism in higher education.
Riots--Washington (D.C.).
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Captain Avis Bailey describes his involvement in Vietnam War protests during his years at the United States Merchant Marine Academy. Because the academy banned students from participating in political protests, the administration sent him letters questioning his intentions. Nevertheless, Bailey earned his B.S. degree in nautical science in 1972, becoming the twentieth African American graduate of the academy. Both of his parents were present at his graduation. After college, Bailey accepted a position with the Sun Oil Company, making him the company's first African American ship's officer. In 1974, Bailey married and had three sons. While training to get his master license in 1978, one of his classmates suggested that he become a pilot. Bailey applied and was accepted, becoming the first licensed African American ship’s pilot in the United States. Bailey hoped that his decision would open the door for other blacks interested in being a ship pilot.

Student movements--New York--Kings Point.
African American merchant mariners.
African American ship pilots.
African Americans--Marriage.
African American children.
liked by both parents and children, as well as his family life. He split up from his wife in 1995, married Tamara Allenette Durant, a former flight attendant, in 2000 and retired six years later. In 2004, Bailey founded the Captain Avis T. Bailey Mariners Foundation, a nonprofit organization that exposes Baltimore's inner-city youth to the maritime industry.

African American merchant mariners.
Women merchant mariners.
African American families--Maryland.
Youth--Services for--Maryland--Baltimore.
African Americans--Marriage.
African Americans--Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Avis T. Bailey, Section A2007_217_001_006, TRT: 0:25:07
2007/07/28

Captain Avis Bailey shares his love of singing. Johnny Mathis and Sam Cooke are among his favorite singers. He frequently sang Johnny Mathis tunes from the helms of his ships. Bailey discusses his involvement in civic and professional organizations. He has been active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Phi Beta Sigma, and the American Pilots' Association. Bailey answers philosophical questions about his life. He sees his return to the United States Merchant Marine Academy as major turning point in his life since that path led to his success as a pilot, a career that he loves.

African Americans--Social life and customs.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Membership.
Nonprofit organizations--Membership.
Cooke, Sam.
Mathis, Johnny.