# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Simeon Booker

## Overview of the Collection

| Repository: | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Booker, Simeon |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker, |
| Dates: | August 1, 2007 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:08:54). |
| Abstract: | Magazine reporter and newspaper reporter Simeon Booker (1918 - ) worked as a reporter for Johnson Publishing Company for fifty-three years covering the Emmitt Till Murder and Trial, the Freedom Rides and the events of the Civil Rights Movement. Booker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 1, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2007_223 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine and newspaper reporter Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr. was born on August 27, 1918 in Baltimore, Maryland to Roberta Waring and Simeon Saunders Booker, Sr., a YMCA director and minister. After his family moved to Youngstown, Ohio, Booker became interested in journalism through a family friend, Carl Murphy, the owner and operator of Baltimore's "The Afro American Newspapers." In 1942, after receiving his B.A. degree in English from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Booker took a job at "The Afro American Newspapers" as a young reporter. In 1945, he moved back to Ohio to work for the "Call and Post." Five years later, Booker was the recipient of the Nieman Fellowship from Harvard University to study journalism and develop his talent as a reporter. After leaving Harvard in 1951, Booker became the first full-time black reporter at "The Washington Post."

In 1954, Booker was hired by the Johnson Publishing Company to report on current events in its weekly digest, "Jet." In 1955, Booker helped to redefine the role of "Jet" and the entire Civil Rights Movement with his famous coverage of the Emmett Till murder and trial, turning an all too familiar event in the Deep South into a national tragedy that united the black community. Booker remained on the dangerous front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, reporting on the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1961, Booker rode with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) Freedom Riders through the Deep South. When the buses were fire bombed in Anniston, Alabama Booker arranged the Freedom Riders’ evacuation with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Continuing his work of in-depth reporting, Booker toured Vietnam and interviewed General Westmoreland for "Jet" in the mid-1960s. In 1964, Booker outlined the importance of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement in his book, "Black Man’s America."
Booker covered every Presidential election since the Eisenhower Administration in his fifty-three years with Johnson Publishing until he retired in 2007. In 1982, Booker received one of the most prestigious awards in journalism, the National Press Club’s Fourth Estate Award.

Simeon Booker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 1, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Simeon Booker was conducted by Paul Brock on August 1, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Magazine reporter and newspaper reporter Simeon Booker (1918 - ) worked as a reporter for Johnson Publishing Company for fifty-three years covering the Emmitt Till Murder and Trial, the Freedom Rides and the events of the Civil Rights Movement.

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:

Booker, Simeon, 1918-

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Johnson Publishing Company, Inc.

Washington Post

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Simeon Booker, August 1, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/8/2011 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
Simeon Booker slates the interview. Booker discusses his parent, grandparents, and siblings. His mother, Roberta Waring, came from Washington, D.C. where her father was the superintendent of black schools. Booker's father, Simeon Booker, Sr., was the director of black YMCA in Youngstown, Ohio and was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Booker talks about his three siblings; he is the second oldest and took on the role of pack leader of the siblings. To survive the economic hardships of the Great Depression, the family lived on the third floor of the YMCA. Booker then describes his education. While he was a good student when he attended South High School in Youngstown, he was by no means a scholar. At South High, Booker discovered a love of writing while reporting for the school newspaper, the "Buckeye Review." Upon graduation, Booker enrolled at Youngstown University then transferred to Virginia Union University in Richmond. Booker describes how he worked hard as a writer and publicist for the sports team so that his family would not have to pay his tuition. After receiving a B.A. degree in English, Booker went to Baltimore, Maryland to work for "The Afro American Newspapers" with Carl Murphy.

African American families--Ohio--Youngstown.
African American parents--Ohio--Youngstown.
African American siblings--Ohio--Youngstown.
Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.).
African American students--Education (Secondary)--Ohio--Youngstown.
Depressions, 1929.
Murphy, Carl, 1889-1967.
The Afro American Newspapers.

Simeon Booker describes his job as a reporter in Baltimore, Maryland with "The Afro American Newspapers." He wrote stories about legal injustices waged against African Americans and went to Maryland Penitentiary to witness blacks being hung. He left the newspaper after two years and went to work for William O. Walker's journal "Call and Post." In 1950 Booker left "Call and Post" to attend Harvard University as part of the Neiman Fellowship. Booker describes how after the fellowship he went to work for "The Washington Post" and he experienced the severe segregation of Washington, D.C. After two years with "The Washington Post," Booker moved to Chicago, Illinois to work at Johnson Publishing Company. While writing for Johnson's publication "Jet," Booker covered Emmett Till's murder and the Congress on Race Equality's Freedom Riders.

African American reporters--Maryland--Baltimore.
Harvard University.
African American reporters--Ohio--Cleveland.
African American reporters--Illinois--Chicago.
Simeon Booker discusses the stories he experienced as a reporter during the Civil Rights Movement. One of the stories he covered was the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. As a black reporter, Booker was barred from the school but had contacts in the FBI who provided him with entry to the building. Booker then talks about Johnson Publishing Company and his relationship with Robert Johnson. Booker continues his discussion of the Civil Rights Movement and describes Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. There were other leaders who fought along with King. Booker laments that these leaders have been forgotten. In 1963, after President John F. Kennedy's assassination, Booker was selected as a member of the press that covered the funeral. Booker ends the tape speaking of the Vietnam War and the mentality of the troops sent to fight a war that they did not understand.

African Americans--Civil rights.
African American reporters.
Little Rock (Ark.)--Race relations.
Central High School (Little Rock, Ark.).
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968 .
School integration--Arkansas--Little Rock.

Simeon Booker discusses his syndicated television talk show on Westinghouse Broadcasting Company. Through his talk show he covered different topics, such as Whitney Young. Booker discusses his friendship with FBI director J. Edgar Hoover. Booker then describes how deeply Robert F. Kennedy's death upset him. Kennedy was a true champion for civil rights for blacks. Booker says that John H. Johnson always supported his decisions. Booker then served as the Washington bureau chief for fifty-three years for Johnson Publishing Company. Booker then discusses his marriage with his wife Carol who is white. He owes her for so much in his life. Booker also has admiration for his father, who continued to work until his death. Booker then ends the tape talking about African American reporters. He urges blacks in the media to cover stories that are relevant and substantial, rather than just sports and entertainment.

Television personalities.
Westinghouse Broadcasting Company.
Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968 .
African American reporters--Washington (D.C).
African Americans in mass media.
African Americans--Marriage.

Simeon Booker narrates photographs from his family live and professional career.