

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alice Key

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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>	Key, Alice Marie, 1911-2010
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 31, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:50:44).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Community activist and newspaper columnist Alice Key (1911 - 2010 ) was the co-host of the first all-African American television talk show in Las Vegas, 'Talk of the Town,' and was active in fighting for civil rights in Nevada and California. She worked to preserve the history of African Americans in Las Vegas through the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association and the Black History Society, Inc. Key was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 31, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_313
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Community activist, dancer, and newspaper columnist Alice Marie Key was born on March 18, 1911, in Henderson, Kentucky to Louise and Malcolm Key. As a young child, she moved to Riverside, California with her family. She finished high school in Riverside and then went to the University of California, Los Angeles to pursue a degree in journalism. Her mother managed a coffee shop near the famous

Club Alabama in central Los Angeles, California. Key met a girl there who worked at the Cotton Club in Culver City, California, who eventually persuaded her to dance at the club, too. She left school and danced for the next five years.

Key's career as a dancer took her to New York where she worked at the Ubangi Club, and later, she spent six months in Europe touring with the Cotton Club Show. In 1943, Key ended her dancing career and started working as a writer for an African American newspaper, the "Los Angeles Tribune." In 1954, she moved to Las Vegas to take a job working for the "Las Vegas Voice." Not long after her arrival, Key and Bob Bailey started the first all-African American television talk show in Las Vegas, "Talk of the Town," which she co-hosted for several months. In the 1960s, Key became the public relations manager for the Nevada Committee for the Rights of Women, which promoted education about birth control and fought for reforms to the abortion laws in Nevada. After that position, she worked for the Economic Opportunity Board until 1971. In 1983, Governor Richard Bryan named Key as the Deputy Commissioner of Labor, a position she held for ten years. She became involved in political campaigns, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and founded the Barbara Jordan Democratic Women's Club. When she retired from public service, Key worked to preserve the history of African Americans in Las Vegas through the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association and the Black History Society, Inc. On July 20, 2005, Key was inducted into KLAS, Channel 8's Wall of Fame.

Key resided until her death on September 29, 2010, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Her dedication to equality and commitment to her community helped to lower barriers faced by women and African Americans in Nevada. She had one daughter, Alice McAbee, two grandsons, and several great-grandchildren.

Alice Marie Key was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 31, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alice Key was conducted by Jacques Lesure on October 31, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Community activist and newspaper columnist Alice Key (1911 - 2010 ) was the co-host of the first all-African American television talk show in Las Vegas, 'Talk of the Town,' and was active in fighting for civil rights in Nevada and California. She worked to preserve the history of African Americans in Las Vegas through the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association and the Black History Society, Inc.

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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:

Key, Alice Marie, 1911-2010

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Key, Alice Marie, 1911-2010--Interviews

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African American women journalists--Interviews.

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African American dancers--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Community Activist

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Newspaper Columnist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers|MediaMakers

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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 Alice Key, October 31, 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 2/5/2020 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

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:32 2007/10/31

Alice Key was born on March 18, 1911 in Henderson, Kentucky to Louise Beverly Key and Malcolm Key, Sr. Key knew little about her biological grandparents, except that her maternal grandfather, Alexander Beverly, was a white man. Instead, Key's maternal family was led by her maternal uncle's parents-in-law, Mary Alves and John Alves. In 1914, the family moved to Riverside, California. There, Key was raised by her mother in a majority African American neighborhood. Key's maternal relatives were politically active, and helped found Riverside's Park Avenue Missionary Baptist Church. She began her education at the integrated Longfellow Elementary School, and suffered a severe burn while in the second grade. She went on to attend Riverside Polytechnic High School; and, upon graduating in 1928, matriculated at the University of California, Los Angeles. Shortly after, Key left school, and became a chorus girl at Frank Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City, California.

Public schools--California--Riverside.

African Americans--California.

Nightclubs--California--Culver City.

University of California, Los Angeles.

African American dancers.

African Americans--Migration--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/10/31

Alice Key performed as a chorus girl at Frank Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City, California. In this role, she danced in three numbers each night, and was billed alongside such notable musical acts as Cab Calloway, Mae Johnson and Lena Horne. In addition to dancing, Key wrote a column for Leon H. Washington, Jr.'s Los Angeles Sentinel newspaper, and protested the American Guild of Variety Artists' unequal pay of dancers of color. While working as a chorus girl, Key befriended trumpeter Louis Armstrong, witnessed the initial meeting of musical partners Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn and heard Bill "Bojangles" Robinson share his acting advice. In 1936, Key left Culver City to perform at the new Cotton Club location in New York City; and, the following year, danced with the Cotton Club's European tour. She also recalls the impact of segregation on African American nightclub artists, who were permitted to work at the all-white venues where they were banned as patrons.

Cotton Club.

Chorus girls.

Ellington, Duke, 1899-1974.

Discrimination in employment--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:57 2007/10/31

Alice Key returned from the Cotton Club's European tour in 1937, and remained in New York City until 1940, when she moved to Los Angeles, California. There, Key gave her final performance as a chorus girl in Duke Ellington's 'Jump for Joy' show at the Mayan Theater. After leaving the industry, Key adopted a daughter, and continued her

career in journalism at the Los Angeles Tribune. There, Key's articles focused on the concerns of African Americans in the entertainment industry, including employment discrimination in the film business. She also wrote about the U.S. military's procedure of segregating blood donations by race; and, due in part to her reporting, the military ended the practice. During this time, Key remained in contact with many of the celebrities she befriended as a chorus girl, including entertainers Lena Horne and Paul Robeson, and boxer Joe Louis. After World War II, Key moved to Las Vegas, Nevada to edit the Las Vegas Voice newspaper, which was owned by Charles West.

African American journalists--California--Los Angeles.

African American journalists--Nevada--Las Vegas.

African American newspapers--Nevada--Las Vegas.

African American newspapers-California--Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:33 2007/10/31

Alice Key met singer William "Bob" Bailey and his wife, Anna Bailey, in Las Vegas, Nevada, where they were slated to perform at the Moulin Rouge Hotel, the city's first desegregated hotel casino. Later, Bailey had difficulty finding work in the television industry in Las Vegas; and, in 1955, Key persuaded him to produce his own program. Key went on to host Bailey's 'Talk of the Town,' the nation's first all-black talk show. The show ended after four months, when Bailey's mother fell ill in Ohio. In 1960, Key moved with her daughter and mother to Riverside, California, although she continued to visit Las Vegas. Politically active in both states, Key was a strong supporter of Nevada Governor Grant Sawyer, and worked to elect a person of color to Riverside's city council. In 1966, Key was named the editor of Charles West's Las Vegas Voice newspaper. She later worked in public relations at the Nevada Committee for the Rights of Women.

African American newspapers--Nevada--Las Vegas.

Moulin Rouge (Hotel-Casino : Las Vegas, Nev.).

African Americans in television broadcasting.

Women in television broadcasting.

Women's rights--Nevada.

Abortion--Law and legislation--Nevada.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:11 2007/10/31

Alice Key danced at the Cotton Club in New York City, where she met singer Billie Holiday. Later, when Holiday was wanted by the police for drug addiction, Key hid Holiday until the drugs left her system, and then put her on a flight to meet her manager in New York City. However, Holiday stopped in Chicago, Illinois, where she began using heroin again. After leaving show business, Key worked as the public relations manager for the Nevada Committee for the Rights of Women, and at the Economic Opportunity Board under J. David Hoggard, Sr. Then, Key joined the staff of Nevada's Democratic Party, and became the director of the Las Vegas branch of the NAACP. In 1983, she was appointed as the deputy commissioner of labor by Nevada Governor Richard Bryan, and remained in that position until her retirement ten years later. In Las Vegas, Key was also involved with The Ladies Who Danced, Inc. and the Barbara Jordan Democratic Women's Caucus.

Holiday, Billie (1915-1959).

Nevada--Politics and government.

Democratic Party. (Nev.).

Nevada. Governor (1983-1989 : Bryan).

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Nevada.

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section  
A2007\_313\_001\_006, TRT: 0:25:21 2007/10/31

Alice Key returned to Riverside, California in 1993, after retiring from her position as the deputy commissioner of labor for the State of Nevada. In 2005, she was honored by KLAS-TV in Las Vegas, Nevada for her work on William "Bob" Bailey's television show, 'Talk of the Town.' In her retirement, Key continued her civic involvement in Las Vegas and Riverside. With casino owner Sarann Knight



Preddy's Moulin Rouge Preservation Association, Inc., she worked to restore the Moulin Rouge Hotel, which was the first desegregated hotel casino in Las Vegas. She was also the president of the Las Vegas Black Historical Society, Inc.; and active with WonderChild-SHEROES, a self esteem building program at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Key describes her advice to aspiring entertainers, and her concerns for the African American community. She also reflects upon her life, the Civil Rights Movement and the importance of history. Key concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Professional associations--Nevada--Las Vegas.