



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

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Key, Alice |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, |
| Dates: | October 31, 2007 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007 |
| Physical Description: | 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:50:44). |
| Abstract: | Community activist, dancer, 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 has 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. |
| Identification: | A2007_313 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

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.

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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Community activist, dancer, 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 has worked to preserve the history of African Americans in Las Vegas through the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association and the Black History Society, Inc.

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:

Alice Key.

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer).

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer).

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews.
Alice Key--Interviews.

African American women journalists--Interviews.

African American dancers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

ArtMakers

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 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 7/27/2011 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, October 31, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Alice Key, Section A2007_313_001_001, TRT: 0:28:32
2007/10/31

Alice Marie Key slates the interview and lists her favorites. She discusses her mother, Louise Key, who was born in Henderson, Kentucky, and was the oldest of four children. Her father, Malcolm Key, who was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. She reveals that he left her mother when she was three years-old and she did not meet him again until she worked at the Cotton Club in Culver City, California. Key notes that she was confused for awhile about who her grandfather was. In high school she learned that her grandmother was once a slave. Key shares her school experiences in Riverside, California; meeting Mexican American children who lived in the neighborhood, and attending church. She discusses deciding to be a journalist and attending UCLA. Key recounts when she met a producer from the Cotton Club, who encouraged her to join show business, this meeting began her professional dancer career.

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 Marie Key continues to talk about choosing to be a chorus girl at the Cotton Club and quitting UCLA. Key shares that as a chorus girl, she mingled and became good friends with some of the stars that either performed or came to watch the shows. After discussing the experiences she had backstage, she talks about emerging as an activist. One of her first protests was against the salary difference between African American and white chorus girls. Key talks about moving from Los Angeles to New York after Ellington recommended her to work at the Cotton Club, but due to construction, she worked at the Ubangi Club first. She recounts what African American life was like in New York and mentions that people were not as politically active as they were in Los Angeles. Key reflects upon her trip to Europe, where she felt little racial discrimination from the people.

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 Marie Key notes that she stayed in New York for a couple more years before returning to Los Angeles, California, at which point she ended her dancing career with her last show being "Jumping Joy." She shares the circumstances that led to the adoption of her daughter Alice. Key then discusses her career as a writer for the "Los Angeles Tribune," where she wrote about murders; and discrimination in housing and the movie industry. She reflects on

one of her stories, “Segregating blood plasma,” which exposed that hospitals were separating blood plasmas by race. Key discusses her relationship with her contemporaries such as Joe Louis, Lena Horne, and Paul Robeson. She reflects on relocating to Las Vegas at the age of forty-three for a position at the “Las Vegas Voice,” the first African American newspaper in Las Vegas, and becoming involved with the Civil Rights Movement in the city.

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 Marie Key discusses the development of the first African American television show, “Talk of the Town,” in 1944, which she hosted and Bob Bailey produced. Key reflects on her career after the show ended in 1945, when she moved back to California and founded the “Riverside Voice” an African American newspaper. She moved back and forth between Riverside and Las Vegas, and was politically active in both cities. After describing her work as the public relations director at the Moulin Rouge Hotel, the first desegregated hotel casino on the Las Vegas strip, she became the editor of the “Las Vegas Voice,” Las Vegas’ African American newspaper, which was founded by Dr. Charles West. She explains how she became the public relations manager for the Nevada Committee for the Rights of Women and helped reform abortion laws in Nevada.

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 Marie Key talks about her friendship with Dinah Washington and Billie Holiday; including her disapproval of Billie’s drug habit. Key discusses her experience in the Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County, Nevada, where she worked from 1969-1972, and her role in the Democratic Party in Nevada. Key reflects on the pressures of taking care of her mother, who was sick and working to elect Richard Bryan to governor (1983-1989). After describing her work to encourage casinos and hotels to hire African Americans and her tenure as president of the Las Vegas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), she talks about becoming the Deputy Commissioner of Labor in Nevada. Key chronicles the founding of two organizations, The Barbara Jordan Democratic Club in 1984, which increased political awareness among African Americans, and Ladies Who Danced, to provide funds for worthy cultural causes.

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 Marie Key discusses life after retirement and the honor of being inducted into KLAS, Channel 8's Wall of Fame in 2005. She takes the opportunity to talk about her approach to preserving the history of African Americans in Las Vegas through the creation of the Black Las Vegas Historical Society, Inc., and her participation in the Moulin Rouge Preservation Association, which was started by her friend Sarann Knight Preddy. Key goes on to say that she hopes that these organizations help children in Las Vegas understand the role of African Americans on a local and national level. She reflects on how she wants to be remembered, provides advice for the African American community, and notes that she would not have chosen a different path in life. Key narrates photographs of family and friends.

African Americans--Nevada--Las Vegas--Societies, etc.

African American history.