

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kathleen E. Bethel

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bethel, Kathleen E., 1953-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel,
Dates:	July 15, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:44:13).
Abstract:	African american studies librarian Kathleen E. Bethel (1953 -) was responsible for the acquisition, maintenance and cataloguing of source materials on African American life and history for the university library system at Northwestern University. She also served on the Board of Trustees for the DuSable Museum of African American History from 1993 to 2007. Bethel was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 15, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_087
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

African American studies librarian Kathleen Evonne Bethel has dedicated her career to developing a broad collection of African American resource materials at Northwestern University. A fourth generation Washingtonian, Bethel was born in the Washington, D.C., area on August 4, 1953, to Helen and Frederick Bethel. From a very early age, she knew that she wished to do “cultural work” for the African American community. After graduating from high school, Bethel received a scholarship from the National Bridge Association to attend Elmhurst College in Illinois. She received her B.A. degree in 1975 and began working for the Newberry Library in Chicago as a receptionist that same year. Bethel worked in this position for two years.

In 1977, Bethel earned her M.A. degree in library science from Rosary College, now Dominican University. She then received a position as branch librarian for the Maywood Public Library in Maywood, Illinois. The next year, Bethel took a position at Johnson Publishing Company, home to *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, working as an assistant librarian for four years. In 1982, Bethel was hired to serve as Northwestern University’s African American Studies librarian. In this capacity, she is responsible for acquisition, maintenance and cataloguing of source materials on African American life and history for the university library system. Seven years later, Bethel earned her second M.A. degree, this time from Northwestern University.

Bethel has not limited her service in African American Studies to Northwestern University. In 1996, she received a Fulbright Library Fellowship to provide expertise and assistance to colleagues at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and in 1999, she became a library fellow for the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities in order to study African American museums. In 2001, Bethel traveled to Paris to participate in an international colloquium on African diasporas. She served on the Board of Trustees for the DuSable Museum of African American History from 1993 to 2007. She is also a member of the NAACP and the Association for the Study of African American Life and

History (ASALH). She has served as a juror for the Black Caucus of the American Library Association Literary Award (BCALA) committee and is an official bibliographer for the Toni Morrison Society. Bethel publishes thematically based summer African American fiction and non-fiction reading lists annually and has also compiled bibliographies on W.E.B. DuBois, personal finance management for black women, and African American theatrical dramas.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kathleen E. Bethel was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 15, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. African american studies librarian Kathleen E. Bethel (1953 -) was responsible for the acquisition, maintenance and cataloguing of source materials on African American life and history for the university library system at Northwestern University. She also served on the Board of Trustees for the DuSable Museum of African American History from 1993 to 2007.

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:

Bethel, Kathleen E., 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bethel, Kathleen E., 1953- --Interviews

African American women librarians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Northwestern University (Evanston, Ill.)

Occupations:

African American Studies Librarian

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Kathleen E. Bethel, July 15, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_001, TRT: 0:29:15
?

Kathleen E. Bethel was born on August 4, 1953 in Washington, D.C. to Helen Roy Bethel and Frederick Bethel. Bethel's maternal great-grandfather, Prince Albert Goines, was born in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1865. He moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a slater and as secretary of the YMCA. He married Mary Geary, and they raised four children, including Bethel's grandmother, Margaret Goines Roy Walcott. Her family took annual vacations to the black-owned Hotel Comfort in Ocean City, New Jersey, where Bethel's great-grandfather met with YMCA official Channing H. Tobias and historian Carter G. Woodson. Upon graduating high school, Bethel's grandmother moved to Kansas City, Missouri, and worked as a seamstress. She married Leonard Roy, with whom she raised Bethel's mother and uncle, Leonard Roy, Jr. In Kansas City, Bethel's maternal family were active in social clubs, and often attended the performances of entertainers like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, as well as orchestra concerts.

African American women librarians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_002, TRT: 0:28:52
?

Kathleen E. Bethel's paternal great-grandmother, Glendora Parham Bethel, was one of three sisters, who sometimes lived in a women's home while their mother searched for work. Bethel's paternal grandfather, Albert Bethel, was born in Hillsborough, North Carolina, and married her grandmother in Washington, D.C. Her paternal grandparents had three sons, and divorced when her father was three years old. He grew up in the Langston Terrace Dwellings, and played sports in high school. Upon graduation, he served in the Quartermaster Corps of the U.S. Army, and then attended Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina, where he met Bethel's mother. They moved to Washington, D.C., and her father became a coach for the D.C. Department of Recreation, while her mother worked for the federal government. In Washington, D.C., Bethel attended Rudolph Elementary School and Barnard Elementary School before being tracked to Keene Elementary School based on her high test scores.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10
?

Kathleen E. Bethel attended Keene Elementary School in Washington, D.C., where many of her peers in the gifted track were girls. During Sunday school, her curiosity was encouraged by pastor, William A. Van Croft, Jr. at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. She was also influenced by her strict fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Travis, and her seventh grade teacher, Enid Tucker Johnson, who was Mordecai Johnson's daughter-in-law, and taught a course on African history. While Washington, D.C. was segregated during Bethel's childhood, she was largely sheltered from racial discrimination by her family. She learned about African American history from black newspapers and Negro History Week, as well as her maternal step-grandfather, William Walcott, who told her of his relationships with George Washington Carver and state department officer Sara Lee Owens. Throughout her childhood, Bethel enjoyed reading, and watching television with her family. She also played the flute, and listened to soul music on WOL Radio.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_004, TRT: 0:30:29
?

Kathleen E. Bethel's parents belonged to middle class social clubs in Washington, D.C. As a teenager, Bethel emulated these clubs with her friends, and attended the Precola DeVore School of Charm. Bethel admired several stylish teachers at Bertie Backus Junior High School and Rabaut Junior High School; and looked up to her aunt, whose home daycare she worked at after class. There, she heard the news of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, and witnessed the riots the following day. Bethel went on to attend Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School under Principal Shirley O'Donnell Brown, a friend of her father. In high school, she studied humanities, enrolled in her first African American studies course and participated in Girls State. With her mother's encouragement, Bethel also became interested in women in the Black Power movement, like Kathleen Cleaver. At this time, she intended to become a lawyer, and did not consider a library career, although there were many librarians in her family.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_005, TRT: 0:28:25
?

Kathleen E. Bethel's mother opposed discrimination within the African American community based on skin color, and encouraged Bethel to wear natural hair while in high school. Upon graduating, Bethel decided to attend Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois, where she was offered a scholarship. When she arrived on campus, local whites accosted her with racial slurs, but she was soon welcomed by African American upperclassmen like Hileria Godfrey and Deborah Edwards. Bethel was mentored by black studies professor Reverend James Mack, and by English professor Huguette Theodore. She often attended lectures by such figures as pianist Ramsey Lewis, and activists Dick Gregory and Angela Davis. During President Richard Nixon's administration, Bethel became disillusioned with American politics, and decided not to attend law school. Through her grandmother, she was introduced to American Library Association president Robert Wedgeworth, who encouraged her to pursue a career as a librarian.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_006, TRT: 0:29:23
?

Kathleen E. Bethel studied for a master's degree in library science at Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois. While studying, she initially worked at a post office, and then as a receptionist to President Lawrence W. Towner at the Newberry Library in Chicago, Illinois. She focused her research on the racial history of libraries, and libraries funded by Andrew Carnegie. Bethel lived on campus for one year, and then moved to Oak Park, Illinois, where she worked as a branch librarian at the Maywood Library. After graduation, Bethel became a librarian at Johnson Publishing Company, where she met musicians like Michael Jackson and Bob Marley, catalogued collections and wrote the Black History Month quiz. She was laid off due to a recession in 1978, and worked as a substitute teacher for one year. In 1982, Bethel became a librarian at Northwestern University, which possessed both an African American studies department and the Melville J. Herskovits African manuscript collection.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_007, TRT: 0:29:36
?

Kathleen E. Bethel worked as the African American studies librarian at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Early in her tenure, historian John Hunwick advised her master's thesis on slave life in Libya. Bethel visited Africa

for the first time with anthropologist Deborah Mack to present research on Sudanese women at a Sudan Studies Association conference in Khartoum, Sudan. During the trip, Bethel also visited the Netherlands and Egypt with her friend Harriet Byrd. In 1989, she returned to Africa with the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad as part of a Teaching about Africa program in Kenya. While there, she also toured Cairo, Egypt with a former student. Bethel talks about the growth of African American studies programs at Northwestern University, her summer reading lists and her desire to remain a librarian rather than become an administrator. She also shares her advice to aspiring librarians, and her concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Kathleen E. Bethel, Section A2008_087_001_008, TRT: 0:19:03
?

Kathleen E. Bethel advocated to end apartheid in South Africa, and was recruited to serve as an electoral observer there in 1994. She returned to South Africa two years later as a Fulbright scholar, and worked in the library of the University Durban-Westville in Durban, South Africa. After attending the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, Bethel became interested in the relationship between nation building and libraries, and began working with libraries internationally. She was active in numerous organizations, including the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, the African American Librarian Conference and the board of the DuSable Museum of African American History. Bethel reflects upon her life and legacy, as well as the importance of African American history. She also talks about her family, and concludes the interviewing by describing how she would like to be remembered.