

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Carl Bell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bell, Carl C.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell,
Dates:	November 3, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:54:20).
Abstract:	Psychiatrist Dr. Carl Bell (1947 - 2019) served as the medical director, president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council, one of the largest not-for-profit community mental health centers in the U.S. He was a professor of clinical psychiatry at the University of Illinois School of Medicine and School of Public Health. Bell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 3, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_117
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Psychiatrist Dr. Carl Compton Bell was born on October 28, 1947, in Chicago, Illinois, to Pearl Debnam Bell and William Yancey Bell, Jr. Bell grew up in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood and graduated from Hyde Park High School in 1965. He received his B.A. degree in biology from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1967. Bell received his M.D. degree in 1971 from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. He completed his psychiatric residency in 1974 at the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute in Chicago, where he worked with children, adolescents and adults. From 1974 to 1976, Bell served as a Lt. Commander in the United States Navy.

Bell has worked as a psychiatrist at numerous Chicago area institutions including Jackson Park Hospital, Human Correctional and Service Institute, Chatham Avalon Mental Health Center, the Chicago Board of Education, and the Community Mental Health Council. In 1982, Bell became the medical director of the Community Mental Health Council, one of the largest not-for-profit community mental health centers in the U.S. Since 1987, he has been the president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council. He has been a professor of clinical psychiatry at the University of Illinois School of Medicine and School of Public Health. In addition, Bell hosted radio talk shows on mental health issues on WVON-AM and WJPC-FM in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Bell is a National Institute of Mental Health international researcher and an author of more than 400 books, chapters, and scientific publications addressing issues of children exposed to violence, violence prevention, HIV prevention, isolated sleep paralysis and misdiagnosis of Manic Depressive Illness. He is the editor of *Psychiatric Perspectives on Violence: Understanding Causes and Issues in Prevention and Treatment*, and author of *Getting Rid of Rats: Perspectives of a Black Community Psychiatrist* and *The Sanity of Survival: Reflections on Community Mental Health and Wellness*.

Bell is the recipient of numerous awards including the E.Y. Williams Distinguished Senior Clinical Scholar Award

from the National Medical Association in 1992. He received the American Psychiatric Association President's Commendation on Violence in 1997. Bell was appointed to the Violence Against Women Advisory Council by then U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno and was a participant in the White House's Strategy Session on Children, Violence, and Responsibility. He was appointed to the working group for the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health - Culture, Race, and Ethnicity; and to the Planning Board for the Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence. In recognition of his efforts to reduce violence, Bell became the first recipient of the American Psychiatric Foundation's Minority Service Award in 2004.

Bell is a member of the American Psychiatric Association, the American Association of Community Psychiatrists, the National Medical Association, Black Psychiatrists of America, and a former vice-president and editor of the American College of Psychiatrists. He is also a founding member and past board chairman of the National Commission on Correctional Health Care.

Bell passed away on August 2, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Carl Bell was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 3, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Psychiatrist Dr. Carl Bell (1947 - 2019) served as the medical director, president and CEO of the Community Mental Health Council, one of the largest not-for-profit community mental health centers in the U.S. He was a professor of clinical psychiatry at the University of Illinois School of Medicine and School of Public Health.

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:

Bell, Carl C.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Bell, Carl C.--Interviews

African American psychiatrists--Interviews

Community mental health personnel--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Psychiatrist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Dr. Carl Bell, November 3, 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 Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Dr. Carl Bell was born on October 28, 1947 in Chicago, Illinois to Pearl Debnam Pratt and William Y. Bell, Jr. His paternal great-great-grandfather was an enslaved Madagascan blacksmith in South Carolina, who eventually bought his freedom and became a Colored Methodist Episcopal minister, as did his son, John H. Bell. Bell's paternal great-grandfather, Edward Compton, owned 120 acres of land in Michigan, where Bell's paternal grandmother, Annabelle Compton Bell, was raised. His paternal grandfather, William Y. Bell, Sr., was a Semitic language scholar, who graduated from the Yale Divinity School and went on to build New York City's Williams Institution C.M.E. Church. He also encouraged President Harry S. Truman to desegregate the U.S. military. Bell's maternal grandparents, Louise Davis Debnam and B.B. Debnam, raised his mother in Montclair, New Jersey. His father grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, where he befriended Alex Haley, who portrayed Bell's paternal great-great-grandfather in his novel, 'Roots.'

African American psychiatrists--Interviews.

Community mental health personnel--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Dr. Carl Bell's parents, Pearl Debnam Pratt and William Y. Bell, Jr., met at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and later obtained master's degrees in social work at Atlanta University. After marrying, they settled in Chicago, Illinois, where they raised two sons, including Bell. His parents divorced when he was two years old, and his father married the sister of activist Whitney Young, Arnita Young Boswell, with whom he had one daughter, Bonnie Boswell. Bell's father served as executive director of the Urban League of Greater Atlanta, and later relocated to California, where he married his third wife, Barbara Bell. During this time, Bell and his older brother, William Y. Bell III, lived with their mother and stepfather, carpenter Marion Pratt. Bell spent his early childhood in Chicago's North Lawndale community, and studied at George Howland Elementary School. At seven years old, he moved with his family to the integrated Hyde Park neighborhood, where he became a member of the Vandells street gang.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_003, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Dr. Carl Bell struggled as a student at George Howland Elementary School on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. His family eventually moved to Chicago's Hyde Park community, where he sang in the choir at St. Paul and the Redeemer

Episcopal Church, and met future news anchor Bryant Gumbel. He attended Kozminski Elementary School, where he was drawn into gang activity, but was also inspired by his African American science teacher, Valcar Bowman, who believed in his abilities. In addition, Bell was influenced by his seventh grade teacher, Lily Rutledge Hayes, who was a strict disciplinarian. He went on to attend Hyde Park High School, where he was mentored by geometry teacher Milton Bins, who encouraged him to focus on his studies. From that time, Bell excelled academically, and was placed in advanced courses. Bell talks about developmental psychology and the formation of children's ethics, as well as his early enjoyment of comic books.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_004, TRT: 0:28:10 ?

Dr. Carl Bell excelled academically at Hyde Park High School in Chicago, Illinois, where his peers included singer Minnie Riperton. He completed summer coursework, and graduated a semester early in 1965. He began his undergraduate education at the Loop Junior College, where a white teacher failed him on the basis of his race. During this period, Bell's mother passed away. He studied for one year at the Southeast College, and then enrolled at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. Around this time, Bell's brother, police officer William Y. Bell III, was fatally shot in the back by his white colleagues while attempting to stop a robbery. Five months later, his father, William Y. Bell, Jr., died from a heart attack. Bell completed a biology degree in 1976, after two years of study. He was denied entry to the University of Illinois College of Medicine due to the school's racial quota, and instead attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Dr. Carl Bell attended the Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, where he worked as a biostatistician to pay for his tuition. During his second year of medical school, he was arrested by the police in Pulaski, Tennessee for failing to provide proof of ownership for his friends' vehicle, and was bailed out of jail by his professor, Dr. Spockwood. After three days, Bell became the target of an FBI investigation for forgery and vehicle theft, but was released after his friends confessed to the charges. In medical school, Bell initially aspired to become a surgeon, and later switched his focus to psychiatry. He graduated in 1971, and began a psychiatric residency in his hometown of Chicago, Illinois. In 1974, he completed his residency with honors and was recommended to become the chief resident, but was denied the position due to his race. He then became a physician at the Naval Station Great Lakes in Lake County, Illinois, where he conducted medical screenings of the new recruits.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_006, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Dr. Carl Bell became a member of the Black Psychiatrists of America in 1971, and joined founder Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Dr. James Comer and Dr. June Jackson Christmas. In 1974, Bell was stationed as a physician at the Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois, where he began to study martial arts. He was discharged in 1976, and was recruited to help implement a community psychiatry program at the Jackson Park Hospital. He left to work for the Chicago Board of Education; the City of Chicago Department of Public Health; and the Human Resources Development Institute, where he was mentored by the organization's chief executive, C. Vincent Bakeman. Bell then joined the Community Mental Health Council, Inc., where he created a day treatment program in 1975, and a mental health center in 1980. In 1982, he became the council's medical director. Bell talks about racial discrimination in healthcare, and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories of repression and spirituality.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_007, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Dr. Carl Bell advocated for prison healthcare reform to Dr. David Satcher in 1993, when Dr. Satcher was the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Following Dr. Satcher's appointment as surgeon general in 1998, Bell was recruited to contribute to 'Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General' and 'The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide,' both of which were published in 1999. The next year, Bell collaborated on the 'Report of the Surgeon General's Conference on Children's Mental Health.' In 2001, Bell conducted research for 'Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity,' and 'Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General,' in which he determined that childhood risk factors did not predict adult criminality. During this time, Bell served as the director of the Community Mental Health Council, Inc., where he focused on preventative healthcare initiatives. Bell describes his research on children exposed to violence, and talks about suicide in the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Carl Bell, Section A2008_117_001_008, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Dr. Carl Bell describes his psychiatric research foci, including childhood exposure to violence and the misdiagnosis of psychiatric illnesses in African American patients. He also talks about the importance of preventative healthcare, as well as his personal philosophy, spirituality and family. Bell reflects upon his life, legacy and family; and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.