

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Walter Bailey, Jr.

PERSON

Bailey, Walter L, 1940-

Alternative Names: Walter Bailey, Jr.;

Life Dates: August 21, 1940-

Place of Birth: Memphis, Tennessee, USA

Work: Memphis, TN

Occupations: Lawyer; County Commissioner

Biographical Note

County commissioner and lawyer Walter Bailey was born in 1940, in Memphis, Tennessee. He graduated from Booker T. Washington high School and went on to attend Southern University on a football scholarship. The student sit-in protests against segregation were sweeping the South at this point and Southern University was no exception. Bailey's brother, D'Army Bailey, also attended Southern University and he became a leader of the Civil Rights Movement on campus. Bailey helped his brother with his civil rights

organizing and went to protests with him, some of which were broken up violently. Southern University did its best to badger the Baileys into giving up their protests and boycotts, eventually expelling his brother and shutting down rather than accepting back its students who had been arrested in various protests.

Undaunted, Bailey went on to receive his J.D. degree from the Southern University Law Center and founded the Walter Bailey law firm. Bailey was involved in several important civil rights-related cases, including the case that desegregated Shelby County public schools and the legal defense of Martin Luther King Jr. during the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968. In 1985, Bailey served as lead counsel on the favorably decided Supreme Court case *Tennessee vs. Garner*, which forbid police officers' use of deadly force to make an arrest unless they had probable cause to believe that the fugitive posed a deadly threat to them or bystanders.

In 1971, Bailey was elected to an unexpired term on the Shelby County Commission and was elected to a full term in the same role in 1972. Bailey served in this capacity until 2006, when term limits required him not to run, and during his tenure on the commission he was elected chairman pro tempore and then chairman proper for two terms. While on the commission, Bailey fought to rename county parks that had been named after various members of the Confederacy. In 2010, once Bailey had waited the mandated period of time, he ran again for the Shelby County Commission and his victory was unopposed.

Related Entries

Booker T. Washington High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Diploma

**Southern University and Agricultural and
Mechanical College** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

?

**Southern University and Agricultural and
Mechanical College** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

J.D. degree

Memphis City Government [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

County Commissioner

Walter Bailey Law Firm [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Founder

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

Board Member