

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Melvin Miller

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Miller, Melvin B., 1934-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller,
Dates:	April 24, 2013 and April 27, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	12 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:41:38).
Abstract:	Newspaper editor Melvin Miller (1934 -) was the founder, publisher and editor of the Bay State Banner, a weekly newspaper advocating the interests of Greater Boston's African American community. Miller was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 24, 2013 and April 27, 2013, in Boston, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_162
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper publisher and editor Melvin B. Miller was born on July 22, 1934 in Boston, Massachusetts. Miller grew up in Boston's middle-class Roxbury neighborhood and graduated from Boston Latin School. He then enrolled at Harvard College and graduated from there in 1956 with his A.B. degree. Following a six month stint as an executive trainee at Aetna Insurance in Hartford, Connecticut, Miller was drafted and served for two years in the U.S. Army. He went on to enroll at Columbia University Law School and earned his J.D. degree from there in 1964. Miller was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar and the Federal

Bar.

Upon graduation, Miller joined the U.S. Department of Justice as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts. In 1965, he founded the *Bay State Banner* and served as the newspaper's publisher, editor, and chief executive officer. In 1973, the Massachusetts Banking Commission appointed Miller as the conservator and chief executive officer of the Unity Bank and Trust Company, Boston's first minority bank. In 1977, Boston Mayor Kevin W. White named him as one of the three commissioners of the Boston Water and Sewer Commission. Miller became Chairman of the Commission in 1980. Miller then became a founding partner in the corporate law firm of Fitch, Miller, and Tourse where he practiced law from 1981 to 1991. He also served as the vice president and general counsel of WHDH-TV, an affiliate of the Central Broadcasting Station, from 1982 to 1993. Miller was a director of the United States-South Africa Leadership Exchange Program (USSALEP). He has written editorials for *The Boston Globe*, *The Pilot*, and *Boston Magazine*, and is the author of *How to Get Rich When You Ain't Got Nothing*.

Miller is a member of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the Harvard Club of Boston, and the St. Botolph Club. Miller is a director of OneUnited Bank and MassINC. He is also a trustee of the Huntington Theatre Company and a trustee emeritus of Boston University.

Miller received the Award of Excellence from the Art Director's Club of Boston in 1970. The New England Press Association awarded Miller the First Prize in General Excellence and the Second Prize in Make-up & Typography in 1970. Miller is a recipient of the Annual Achievement Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people. Miller received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Suffolk University in 1984 and an Honorary Doctor Humane Letters degree from Emerson College in 2010.

Melvin B. Miller was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 24, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Melvin Miller was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 24, 2013 and April 27, 2013, in Boston, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 12 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Newspaper editor Melvin Miller (1934 -) was the founder, publisher and editor of the *Bay State Banner*, a weekly newspaper advocating the interests of Greater Boston's African American community.

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:

Miller, Melvin B., 1934-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Miller, Melvin B., 1934---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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Occupations:

Newspaper Editor

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Melvin Miller, April 24, 2013 and April 27, 2013. 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).

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 Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_001_001, TRT: 1:28:19 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller was born on July 22, 1934 in Boston, Massachusetts to Louise O'Banyoun Miller and John Miller. Miller's maternal great-great-great-grandfather, Simon Peter O'Banyoun, was born a slave in Kentucky, and fled to Toronto, Canada in the early 1800s. He became a successful businessman, and established one of Canada's first A.M.E. Zion churches. Miller's maternal great-great-grandfather, Josephus O'Banyoun, founded the Famous Canadian Jubilee Singers. After touring with the group in Europe, he settled with his family in Boston, where Miller's maternal grandfather, Ernest O'Banyoun, was born. Miller's maternal grandmother, Ella Harten O'Banyoun, was born in York, South Carolina to Elvira Johnson Harten, a Cherokee woman who married a wealthy German named William Harten. When he was killed, Miller's grandmother fled the South and came to Boston. She found work as a domestic and married Miller's grandfather, who was a musician. They raised Miller's mother in Boston's Roxbury community.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_001_002, TRT: 2:30:18 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller's mother, Louise O'Banyoun Miller, was related by marriage to a mixed race family from Nova Scotia, Canada. Their ancestors included an English Tory who escaped to Canada during the Revolutionary War. Miller's paternal grandmother, Mary Miller, was also born in Nova Scotia, and had Native American and African ancestry. Her husband, Miller's paternal grandfather Daniel Miller, was born in Jamaica to a Scottish father and Jamaican mother. He found work on a whaling ship and immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, where he met and married Miller's paternal grandmother. Years later, Miller's father, John Miller, served overseas in World War I, and then became a supervisor at the U.S. Post Office Department in Boston. There, he met Miller's mother, Louise O'Banyoun Miller, who was studying to become an educator at the State Teachers College in Framingham, Massachusetts. She left before graduating to marry Miller's father, with whom she raised six children in the Washington Park section of Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_001_003, TRT: 3:32:26 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller grew up on Harold Street in the integrated Washington Park neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. There, he attended David A. Ellis Elementary School and Henry L. Higginson Elementary School. Throughout his early education, Miller voiced his opposition to the discriminatory curriculum, which included the book 'The Story of Little Black Sambo' and slave songs like 'Shortnin' Bread.' As a child, Miller enjoyed reading and driving with his father to Harvard Square in nearby Cambridge, Massachusetts. He went on to attend the Boston Latin School alongside Minister Louis Farrakhan, who left the school after their freshman year. Miller was one of four black students at the Boston Latin School, and continued to confront his teachers about racially discriminatory lessons. Although his grades suffered, he performed well on tests, and was offered a full scholarship to Tufts College in Medford, Massachusetts during his junior year. He turned down the offer, and enrolled at Harvard University instead.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section

A2013_162_001_004, TRT: 4:31:09 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller was committed to speaking out against discrimination from an early age. His family belonged to the congregation of the St. Mark Congregational Church in Boston, Massachusetts, where he criticized the Cub Scout troop for rejecting his friend because he was Jewish. Miller continued his education at the Boston Latin School, where he competed on the track team. He received low grades because of his willingness to confront his teachers, but performed well on standardized tests, and was sometimes accused of cheating. After graduating in 1952, Miller studied economics at Harvard University. There, he joined a community of African American students that included the architect J. Max Bond, Jr., Judge Frederick L. Brown and William Wharton, the brother of statesman Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. While at Harvard University, Miller was active with the NAACP, and traveled to Washington, D.C. to demonstrate his support for an anti-lynching bill. He also challenged his professors' discriminatory grading practices.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_001_005, TRT: 5:30:35 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller studied at Harvard University from 1952 to 1956. During that time, he struggled in his classes. He was also involved in a number of student organizations, including the Harvard-Radcliffe Society for Minority Rights, which was the school's branch of the NAACP. After completing his bachelor's degree in 1956, Miller was recruited by the Connecticut Commission on Civil Rights to help to end the discriminatory hiring practices at the Aetna Life and Casualty Company. Six months later, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to Germany. While there, he studied at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universitat Frankfurt am Main. At this point in the interview, Miller talks about his family's role in the political career of U.S. Senator Edward Brooke, who was encouraged by Miller's maternal grandmother, Ella Harten O'Banyoun, to run for state representative in 1950. Miller also talks about Brooke's Republican affiliation, and the Irish control of Boston's Democratic Party.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section

A2013_162_001_006, TRT: 6:31:59 2013/04/24

Melvin Miller was stationed in Frankfurt am Main, Germany during his two years of service in the U.S. Army. Following his discharge, Miller moved to New York City to attend Columbia Law School. There, he studied under Adolf A. Berle, who was a former member of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's cabinet. While in school, Miller worked as an insurance investigator in the city's Harlem neighborhood, where many of his white colleagues were afraid to visit. On one occasion, Miller was accosted by a group of policemen while waiting for a friend in a city park, and was forced to use his recent training in taekwondo to avoid injury. After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1964, Miller worked on U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy's reelection campaign, and then accepted a position as an assistant U.S. attorney. In 1965, Miller founded an African American newspaper called the Bay State Banner to spread information about urban renewal in his hometown of Boston, Massachusetts.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_002_007, TRT: 7:29:06 2013/04/27

Melvin Miller founded the Bay State Banner in Boston, Massachusetts in 1965. Initially, the newspaper was funded with help from his father, John Miller, and a small bank loan. Miller created the paper to educate Boston's African American community in Roxbury about political and economic issues such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report 'The Negro Family.' The structure of the Bay State Banner was based upon the city's earlier African American papers, the Boston Chronicle and William Monroe Trotter's Boston Guardian. Trotter was a friend of Miller's uncle; and, in 1965, Miller met with Trotter's business partner, Charles Stewart, who offered him advice and mentorship. In the early years of the Bay State Banner, Miller served as the publisher and employed an editor who previously worked for The Boston Globe. After they came into conflict about the direction of the paper, Miller took over the editorial role as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_002_008, TRT: 8:29:08 2013/04/27

Melvin Miller covered local and national politics in the Bay State Banner, which was based in Boston, Massachusetts. The newspaper's early stories included the Moynihan Report of 1965 and the urban renewal program in the city's Roxbury neighborhood. As the editor and publisher of the Bay State Banner, Miller also endorsed the senatorial campaigns of Edward Brooke. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the Bay State Banner covered the desegregation of the Boston Public Schools, which was opposed by Louise Day Hicks and the Boston School Committee. The integration process began with Ellen Swepson Jackson's Operation Exodus, which provided transportation for African American children who wanted to attend open enrollment schools in white neighborhoods. Around that time, James Breeden and Melvin King began organizing boycotts of the public schools, and advocated for a community school system in Roxbury. Miller also talks about the problem of gender discrimination in Boston's elite exam schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_002_009, TRT: 9:31:19 2013/04/27

Melvin Miller's Bay State Banner newspaper covered the violent response to the desegregation of the Boston Public Schools, and he personally visited the schools to disperse troublemakers. He recalls the opening of the integrated William Monroe Trotter School in Roxbury, where he saw a group of African Americans confront the militant protestors. In 1967, Miller covered the sit-in demonstration against welfare restrictions at Grove Hall, which ended in police violence. As the audience of the Bay State Banner grew, Miller expanded its circulation to other cities in Massachusetts. However, he was forced to reduce circulation and staff after several financial crises. During this time, Miller also formed an organization that sought to increase minority representation in the media. In 1973, he became the conservator of the Unity Bank and Trust Company, which was founded in Boston in 1968. The organization was later renamed OneUnited Bank, and became the nation's largest black-owned bank.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_002_010, TRT: 10:31:05 2013/04/27

Melvin Miller campaigned for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1972, with the aim of removing the incumbent Louise Day Hicks from office. Although Miller lost the election, it was won by the Independent candidate Joe Moakley, and Hicks lost her national political office. From 1973 to 1975, Miller served as conservator of the Unity Bank and Trust Company in Boston, Massachusetts. During that time, he was instrumental in the standardization of welfare disbursement procedures, which were adopted by welfare systems across the United States. In 1981, Miller cofounded the all-black law firm of Fitch, Miller and Tourse, where he served as counsel to the Metropolitan Transit Authority. He also served as general counsel at Boston's WHDH-TV. While working as a lawyer, Miller continued to serve as the editor and publisher of the Bay State Banner. The newspaper partnered with Jobs Clearing House, Inc. to run employment advertisements for large firms like the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section
A2013_162_002_011, TRT: 11:28:28 2013/04/27

Melvin Miller served as the editor and publisher of the Bay State Banner for over four decades. The newspaper employed a small staff of part time writers, including Howard Manly and Brian O'Connor, who went on to work for Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy II. A number of staff members belonged the National Association of Black Journalists, and the newspaper was also associated with the National Newspaper Publishers Association. As technology advanced, Miller created a website for the paper. He talks about the challenges faced by newspapers in the digital age, and his plans for the future of the Bay State Banner. Miller also reflects upon his role as a mentor to young people through his work as a substitute teacher and the editor of the Bay State Banner. One of his mentees was Tony Rose, who became a publisher and received a NAACP Image Award in 2013. Miller talks about his book, 'How to Get Rich When You Ain't Got Nothing,' and reflects upon his concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Melvin Miller, Section

Melvin Miller was married to Sandra Casagrand, who also worked in the publishing industry. Together, they had one daughter. Miller describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy.