Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Butler, Bob, Jr., 1953-

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bob Butler, Jr.,

Dates: November 6, 2013

Bulk Dates: 2013

Physical Description: 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:23:26).

Abstract: Television news reporter Bob Butler, Jr. (1953 - ) served as 20th president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) from 2013 to 2015, and as president of the Bay Area Black Journalists Association (BABJA) from 2004 to 2009. Butler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 6, 2013, in Antioch, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2013_303

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist Bob Butler was born on June 5, 1953 in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Butler grew up in a Navy family, and, as a child, he travelled throughout the United States. Butler attended St. Joseph-Notre Dame High School in Alameda, California, where he graduated in 1971. Before graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He served in Guantanamo Bay and Newport, Rhode Island before receiving an honorable discharge in Philadelphia in 1974.

In 1974, Butler moved to Washington, D.C. and then Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,
where he worked for Bell Telephone as a directory assistance operator while moonlighting as a disco deejay. In 1977, Butler returned to Hayward, California and studied at Chabot College where he also filled hourly newscasts at the campus station. Upon graduating from Chabot College in 1979, he briefly worked at Soulbeat Television; and, in 1980, was hired as a general assignment reporter at KDIA radio in Oakland, California.

Butler transferred to San Francisco State University and interned at KCBS radio in 1981. Shortly after, he was brought on as a desk assistant and then was hired on staff in 1982. Butler worked at the editor’s desk and became a fill-in reporter during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake where he covered a wide range of topics throughout the United States, including local and national politics, natural disasters, and general news.

Butler became the weekend morning reporter in September of 1999 and covered international stories in Brazil, Europe, and countries in Africa such as Namibia, Tanzania, and Senegal. In 2005, Butler was promoted to diversity director for CBS Corp. where he recruited diverse candidates for positions with the company’s radio and television stations. He left full-time employment at CBS in 2006, and was a lead reporter on the Chauncey Bailey Project as an investigative reporter from 2007 to 2011.

Butler’s career includes leadership roles in various professional organizations. In 2000, Butler became a member for the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and began mentoring college students on the radio projects in 2002. He was elected president of the Bay Area Black Journalists Association (BABJA) in 2004, where he served for five years. In 2007 Butler was elected as NABJ’s regional director. He was promoted to vice-president of broadcast in 2009, and was elected the 20th President on August 2, 2013.

Butler joined the San Francisco board of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) in 1999. He became a member of the inaugural national board when AFTRA and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) merged in 2012, creating SAG-AFTRA.

Butler lives with his wife, Lois Butler, in the San Francisco Bay Area. They have one son, Robert Butler, III.

Bob Butler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 6, 2013.

Scope and Content
This life oral history interview with Bob Butler, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 6, 2013, in Antioch, California, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Television news reporter Bob Butler, Jr. (1953 - ) served as 20th president of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) from 2013 to 2015, and as president of the Bay Area Black Journalists Association (BABJA) from 2004 to 2009.

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:

Butler, Bob, Jr., 1953-
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Butler, Bob, Jr., 1953--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Television News Reporter

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 Bob Butler, Jr.,
Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Bob Butler, Jr., Section A2013_303_001_001, TRT: 1:28:33 2013/11/06

Bob Butler, Jr. was born on June 5, 1953 in Chelsea, Massachusetts to Leola Evelyn Butler and Robert Henry Butler, Sr. His maternal great-grandmother was part Native American and Haitian. Butler’s maternal grandfather, Charles Moore, worked as a porter for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, and advocated for the aging. He died in 1994; Butler attended his funeral in Boston, Massachusetts. His maternal grandmother, Maxine Moore, worked at a local glass factory. Butler’s mother grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she attended Cambridge High and Latin School. Butler’s paternal great-great-grandfather was born on a plantation in Greenville, South Carolina in the 1850s. The family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in the early 20th century. Butler’s father served in the U.S. Navy so the family moved often throughout his childhood and teenage years. He describes his parents’ personalities, who
Bob Butler, Jr. grew up in a majority white communities, living in temporary housing or on a naval base, and remembers experiencing racial discrimination as a child. He attended Catholic schools and served as an altar boy. He remembers watching HistoryMaker Belva Davis’ television newscasts in the late 1960s. Butler attended St. Joseph Notre Dame Academy in Alameda, California, and played soccer and ran track. He recalls civil unrest in California during the 1960s and the 1968 assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. Butler describes his parents’ pre-World War II generation’s and their cautious attitudes towards race relations. Butler intended to attend college on scholarship after graduating high school in 1971, but the offer from Central College in Pella, Iowa did not cover the full tuition cost. He enrolled in the U.S. Navy, despite the branch’s history of discrimination. Butler was stationed at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base where he worked with Cubans.

Bob Butler, Jr. started DJing parties in high school. While serving in the U.S. Navy at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, he took part in a defense training exercise and DJed parties. Butler received an honorable discharge in 1974 despite being caught drinking and smoking on several occasions. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he worked at UPS before obtaining a full-time position with AT&T. After moving back to California, he continued to DJ at clubs and house parties. Butler enrolled at Chabot College in Hayward, California in 1977 to study Mass Communications. He wrote and reported an hourly newscast for the college radio station. Upon graduating in 1979, he briefly worked for Soul Beat, a television station in Oakland, California. In 1975, HistoryMaker Paul Brock founded the National Association of Black Journalists to represent black reporters in the mainstream media. During the late 1970s, black figures, such as Max Robinson and
HistoryMaker Carole Simpson, began to emerge onto the national media landscape.

Video Oral History Interview with Bob Butler, Jr., Section A2013_303_001_004, TRT: 4:28:13 2013/11/06

Bob Butler, Jr. left Soul Beat, a television station in Oakland, California, in 1979. He briefly worked for two San Francisco Bay area radio stations before accepting an internship at KCBS and enrolling part-time at San Francisco State University. In 1981, he started full-time work as a desk assistant at KCBS, and he quickly learned the unpredictable nature of news reporting. Butler covered the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco and the Oakland firestorm of 1991. KCBS won numerous journalism awards during Butler’s twenty-five years at the station. Soul Beat television went off the air in 2003 following the 2002 trial of Yusuf Bey, founder of Your Black Muslim Bakery. Chauncey Bailey, former news director for Soul Beat, was murdered in 2007. Butler led the Chauncey Bailey Project, an investigative journalism project supported by the National Association of Black Journalists.

Video Oral History Interview with Bob Butler, Jr., Section A2013_303_001_005, TRT: 5:29:12 2013/11/06

Bob Butler, Jr. joined the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) and attended his first conference in 2000. Two years later, he began mentoring aspiring black journalists through the NABJ student program. A young journalist he met on a 2004 trip to Namibia died from malaria at the 2005 NABJ conference. In the summer of 2005, he visited Namibia and Tanzania on an Ethel Payne fellowship through NABJ as part of an investigative report on malaria. Butler’s experiences with student mentoring inspired him to develop a similar program for CBS. In 2005, he left KCBS radio in San Francisco, California to become CBS’s diversity director. Butler recalls the 2007 raid on Yusuf Bey’s Your Black Muslim Bakery following the death of Chauncey Bailey and the 2008 election of HistoryMaker Barack Obama. Butler became the twentieth president of NABJ in 2013.
Bob Butler, Jr. left his position as diversity director at CBS in 2006. He briefly considered rejoining KCBS in San Francisco, California but decided to teach and pursue projects such as the Chauncey Bailey Project. In 2007, Butler became a regional director for the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). He conducted a diversity study of blacks in media management positions and provided career counseling to aspiring journalists. Butler served two terms as NABJ’s vice president of broadcast from 2009 to 2013. Butler relied on his professional network in his 2013 campaign for president of NABJ. Journalists such as Doug Mitchell and Vince Hill as well as former mentees supported him. Butler won the 2013 election. In his first year as president, Butler instituted a volunteer program and a constitutional review commission. He hopes NABJ will play a greater role in conversations about diversity in media. Butler reflects upon his legacy.

Bob Butler, Jr. received funding from the Fund for Independence in Journalism to report on forced mortgage payoffs in New Orleans, Louisiana in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He worked with an intern from The Lens, a New Orleans news outlet, to report the story of one family’s seven year battle to reclaim their house. Butler won an Edward R. Murrow journalism award for the story, published in 2012. He describes battling a drug addiction and his decision to enter a rehabilitation program in 1986. Butler lives in Antioch, California with his wife and sister. He concludes by describing how he would like to be remembered and narrating his photographs.