

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Paul Berry

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Berry, Paul, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry,
Dates:	January 29, 2014 and May 9, 2022
Bulk Dates:	2014 and 2022
Physical Description:	13 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:50:43).
Abstract:	Broadcast journalist Paul Berry (1944 -) was the creator of WJLA-TV's <i>Seven on Your Side</i> and <i>Crimesolvers</i> and WTNT-AM's <i>The Paul Berry Show</i> before founding Paul L. Berry & Associates. Berry was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 29, 2014 and May 9, 2022, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_034
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast journalist Paul Berry was born on February 15, 1944 in Detroit, Michigan to Donella Sneed and Paul Lawrence Berry, Sr. In 1961, he enrolled in the United States Air Force School to become a licensed practical nurse and graduated from there in 1962. From 1966 to 1967, he attended the Department of Defense Information School, where he studied journalism.

In 1968, Berry was assigned to the Tuy Hoa Air Force Base in Vietnam, where he served as a program director and sportscaster for the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service while launching South Vietnam's first FM radio station. In 1969, Berry was hired as a weekend anchor and reporter at Detroit's ABC outlet WXYZ-TV. In 1972, he left WXYZ-TV and was hired as a weekend news anchor and weekday reporter at ABC-7 WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C. In 1978, Berry launched WJLA-TV's community service programs *Seven on Your Side* and *Crimesolvers*, before hosting WJLA-TV's *In-Person* show in 1993. In 1994, Berry was promoted to senior anchor on WJLA-TV's 5, 6 and 11 p.m. newscasts and, five years later, in 1999, he left WJLA-TV to host his own radio show, *The Paul Berry Show* on WTNT-AM, where he remained until 2004. In 2000, he founded the media consulting company Paul L. Berry & Associates and served as its president until 2006, when he was appointed an executive advisor for Booz Allen Hamilton. In 2007, Berry was named the host of *Home & Family Finances* on Radio America Network. Berry was named the host of *Streetwise with Paul Berry* on WWRC 1260 The Answer in 2016.

In 1987, Berry joined the board of Neediest Kids, where he served as vice president. In 1994, he established the Paul Berry Academic Scholarship Foundation and served as its president until 2005. Berry also has served as president of the Chesapeake chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and commissioner for Maryland Public Television and on the boards of the Ford Theatre, the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, the Washington Jesuit Academy, and the Talbot County Tax Assessment Board. In 1982, Berry won the National Academy of Television Arts and Science's Ted Yates Award. In 1986, he received the Humanitarian Award from

the National Martin Luther King, Jr., Student Leadership Conference. Then, in 1991, *Washingtonian* magazine named Berry "Washingtonian of the Year." In 1993, he won the Capital Region Emmy Award for Outstanding News Anchor; and, in 1994, he was voted into the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences "Silver Circle."

Berry and his wife, Amy Berry, reside in Washington, D.C. They have three children.

Paul Berry was interviewed by *The History Makers* on May 9, 2022.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Paul Berry was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 29, 2014 and May 9, 2022, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 13 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Broadcast journalist Paul Berry (1944 -) was the creator of WJLA-TV's Seven on Your Side and Crimesolvers and WTNT-AM's The Paul Berry Show before founding Paul L. Berry & Associates.

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:

Berry, Paul, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Berry, Paul, 1944---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Broadcast Journalist

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 Paul Berry, January 29, 2014 and May 9, 2022. 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 Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_001, TRT: 1:28:40 ?

Broadcaster Paul Berry was born in Detroit, Michigan on February 15, 1944. His mother, Donnella Sneed, was born June 22, 1923 in Detroit, Michigan, to Annie and Plez Talley. She grew up on Detroit's west side and attended the Church of God church in the Black Bottom neighborhood. She sang in the church with her siblings and cousins. Her birth name was Gladys Talley, but she legally changed it to Donnella in 1968, after marrying Berry's stepfather, Mel Sneed. Berry spent a great deal of time with his grandfather and great-grandfather, Plez Talley and James "Papa Jim" Hudson, respectively, in his childhood. He recalls that his great-grandfather often gave him life advice. Berry's grandfather worked for Ex-Cell-O, an auto parts and machine tools company. He taught his grandson to farm from a young age. Berry remembers sawing wood and driving the tractor from the age of seven when he moved with his grandparents and sister to Swanton, Ohio. He now lives in Easton, Maryland.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_002, TRT: 2:28:16 ?

Paul Berry describes his mother, Donnella, who attended Highland Park High School in Highland Park, Michigan, before attending Wayne State University. She received her nursing license and became a union representative for SEIU. His father, Paul Lawrence Berry, was born on June 12, 1918, near Paris, Kentucky. His parents, Corrine and Ed Berry, had nine children. Berry's father served in the military and travelled to bases around the country as a cook. After being discharged, he worked in the automobile industry and as a member of United Automobile Workers in Detroit, Michigan. He and Berry's mother met in church, married, then separated when he was three years old. Berry was sent to live with his grandparents in Swanton, Ohio and his sister, Debra, went to live with their Aunt Armentha. He sometimes traveled to church conventions with his pastor, Reverend Jackson. Berry describes his relationship with his maternal grandmother, who raised him, and how she taught him how to cook when he was eight years of age.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_003, TRT: 3:28:23 ?

Paul Berry describes his sister, Debra, as two years younger. Although she no longer practices, she was trained as a nurse. Berry describes his earliest childhood memory and how it taught him to reflect on his life. He also describes his memories of living in Highland Park, Michigan. The boxer Joe Louis Barrow was a close friend of Berry's uncle, Kenneth Talley, and often visited their home. Berry recalls his youth in Swanton, Ohio, noting that there were few African Americans in the area. He compares living in Swanton to having lived in Detroit, noting that his grandparents' home in Swanton did not have running water. His grandparents, having both been born in Tennessee, placed a lot of importance on "working the land". Berry describes attending his local Church of God church four times a week and having to memorize the Old Testament books forwards and backwards. Berry listened to Gabriel Heatter's radio show with his grandfather. Radio was an important part of family life at the time.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_004, TRT: 4:28:12 ?

Paul Berry remembers his childhood in Swanton, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan and the role of radio and the used Zenith television set. In second grade, he and his classmates from Willard Elementary School in Detroit, Michigan, took a field trip to a television station where he took great delight in the television station, the cameras and the lights. In Swanton, Ohio, Berry was one of several African American children who were bused to schools as a part of desegregation efforts. He describes experiencing racism and his attempts at making friends. At

the start of high school, Berry returned to Detroit to live with his father. There he attended the High School of Commerce, which was part of Cass Technical High School, and graduated in the spring of 1961. Afterwards, he joined the U.S. Air Force. Without his college degree, he was prevented from flying and instead was assigned to work as a medical and dental technician. He was assigned to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, then Gunther Air Force Base in Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_005, TRT: 5:28:22 ?

Paul Berry describes facing unbridled racism while stationed at Gunther Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. He arrived in Alabama in 1961, around the time of the Freedom Rides, but was unprepared for the racism he would encounter. He was stationed at Gunther for three months before moving to Germany to continue his training and with school. After being stationed at Bitburg Air Force Base in Germany for three years, he returned to the U.S. and was stationed in California, where he began flight school. His training was interrupted when he was assigned to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. The Pentagon sent a memorandum saying they wanted to integrate the Air Force's radio and television services; Berry applied and was selected for training. He relocated to Fort Benjamin in Indiana, for training. Shortly after, he was stationed in Vietnam at Tuy Hoa, where he started the base's radio station and reported on the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy which there had been talk of censoring.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_006, TRT: 6:28:23 ?

Paul Berry talks about his time in the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam, where he started a radio station. After returning to the United States in 1968, he made his first civilian foray into television broadcasting with Detroit's WXYZ Channel 7, where he worked as a copywriter before appearing on television as a reporter. He initially expected to return to Gunther Air Force Base in Texas after leaving Vietnam, but returned to Detroit to visit family and was hired at ABC 7 (WXYZ), which was actively recruiting African American reporters at the time. He notes that his on-air presence served as a type of pacifier in times of unrest. In 1972, he had the opportunity to leave Detroit for Washington, D.C., where he worked for WJLA (then WMAL). Berry describes the double standards African Americans such as Max Robinson faced regarding their credentials. He also comments on his brief tenure as a newscaster for BET.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_007, TRT: 7:29:08 ?

Berry describes leaving his position as anchor at the ABC-TV owned WXYC in Detroit, Michigan to become anchor for WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C. He found the Washington, D.C. news environment to be more restrictive and political. Berry described his reporting about the lack of knowledge, different from international students, in Howard University's African American student population about South Africa and Rhodesia. ABC-TV national news anchor Max Robinson demanded that he attend a meeting at Howard University, but he declined and WJLA-TV supported his decision despite the pressure placed on them. Later, Robinson would apologize to Berry, give him a painting and befriend him. He also shares stories about Washington, D.C. Mayor Marion Barry and his contributions to the African American community, radio deejay Petey Greene, who he describes as a "real personality"; and the Washington Post's Nicholas Von Hoffman who criticized his driving a Roll Royce.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_008, TRT: 8:28:21 ?

Paul Berry recalls coming to work at Washington, D.C.'s WJLA-TV in 1972, the same year as the Watergate scandal. He had previously met Bob Woodward

and Carl Bernstein on the “local” beat. He also describes his role in several local shows including “7 On Your Side,” where viewers could call in complaints that the station would help to resolve. Berry started a show called “Crime Solvers,” which provided cash rewards for those providing information on area crimes and then he also developed the “No-No List,” about local food establishments that had been closed for health violations. Berry also describes his role as vice president in the Neediest Kids, a non-profit organization that provided resources to school-aged children. He also talks about the problems with Washington D.C. public schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_001_009, TRT: 9:12:54 ?

Paul Berry narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_002_010, TRT: 10:31:17 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_002_011, TRT: 11:31:50 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_002_012, TRT: 12:30:56 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Paul Berry, Section A2014_034_002_013, TRT: 13:16:01 ?