

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Albert Stiles

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Stiles, Al, 1922-2014
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 31, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:09:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Entertainer Albert Stiles (1922 - 2014 ) started a program called the Talent Factory, teaching inner city youth the theater arts. In 2002 he released the compact disc, "We Can Fly," which he produced with his son, jazz drummer Ronald Stiles. He has also performed with such stars as Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker. Stiles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 31, 2002, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_126
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Al Stiles was born on August 13, 1922, and raised in Tampa, Florida. He began performing at an early age with a five-member jug band. At approximately age twelve, he took a bus to New York City with a nine-year old jug band partner, Nathaniel Reese. Without their parents' knowledge, they auditioned and played on CBS Radio's *Major Bowes Amateur Hour*. They won the show's contest and Stiles became a professional entertainer.

Stiles performed with a vaudeville novelty and comedy act before touring with a song and dance team. In 1939, he and Reese played New York's Apollo Theater. The same year, Stiles performed at the New York World's Fair. He also performed with such stars as Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald and Sammy Davis, Jr. and in such venues as the Cotton Club and the Blue Note. Stiles served in the U.S. Army and was stationed outside Ft. Wayne, Indiana..

Stiles moved to Fort Wayne and in 1971 opened Al Stiles World's Best Shoe Shine which is still the "in" place to have your shoes shined. In the 1980s, he started a program called the Talent Factory, teaching inner city youth the theater arts. Although the non-profit organization went on hiatus in the late 1990s, Stiles was planning its revival. In 2002, he released the compact disc *We Can Fly*, which he produced with his jazz drummer son, Ronald Stiles. The nine track compact disc features blues, jazz and 1950s-era rock sung by Al Stiles, Ronald Stiles and Herb Banks. Two songs are Stiles' original compositions. The Apollo Theater honored the contributions of Stiles by declaring him a living legend. Stiles passed away on January 2, 2014 in Carmel, Indiana

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Albert Stiles was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 31, 2002, in Fort Wayne,

Indiana, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Entertainer Albert Stiles (1922 - 2014 ) started a program called the Talent Factory, teaching inner city youth the theater arts. In 2002 he released the compact disc, "We Can Fly," which he produced with his son, jazz drummer Ronald Stiles. He has also performed with such stars as Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Stiles, Al, 1922-2014

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Stiles, Al, 1922-2014--Interviews

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African American entertainers--Interviews

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African American businesspeople--Indiana--Interviews

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Depressions--1929--United States

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Shoe stores--Indiana

Original amateur hour (Radio program)

Runaways

African American families--Florida

New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs

Apollo Theatre (New York, N.Y. : 42nd Street)

African American musicians--Interviews

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American

United States--Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century

Hampton, Lionel

Performing arts--United States--History--20th century

Discrimination in employment

International Printing Pressmen’s Union of North America

Actions and defenses--Indiana--Fort Wayne

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

**Occupations:**

Entertainer

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

EntertainmentMakers

**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 Albert Stiles, July 31, 2002. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:55 ?

Albert B. Stiles details his parents' backgrounds. He discusses his own popularity as a child and how he was able to convince others to go along with his beliefs. Stiles talks about his father's history and ways he was impressed by him. He talks about the success of his shoe shining business and describes how he first got into radio broadcasting. Stiles gives some insight into the troubles his family faces during the Great Depression as well as the jobs his parents held. Then, he describes himself as child and speaks about his early attempts at entrepreneurship. He also talks about serving as a ring-bearer in many weddings. Albert B. Stiles explains how his personality made him a natural-born leader as a child. He then talks about his early adventures and successes in performing in public.

African American entertainers--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Indiana--Interviews.

Depressions--1929--United States.

Shoe stores--Indiana.

Original amateur hour (Radio program).

Runaways.

African American families--Florida.

New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Apollo Theater (New York, N.Y. : 125th Street).

African American musicians--Interviews.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

United States. Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century.

Hampton, Lionel.

Performing arts--United States--History--20th century.

Discrimination in employment.

International Printing Pressmen's Union of North America.

Actions and defenses--Indiana--Fort Wayne.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Albert B. Stiles gives the names of his brother and sisters. He then tells of his experiences in elementary school and how he first became aware of his love of performing. Stiles also recalls his favorite teachers in school. Then, he talks about his love of baseball as a child. Stiles tells the story of how he and Nathaniel Reese left home without telling their parents in order to audition for the Major Bowes' Amateur Hour. Stiles talks about the success they had on the show and details their stay in New York City. He recalls his mother's reaction to his departure and then gives more details about his encounters in New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:09 ?

Albert B. Stiles talks about his return to New York City at age eleven and his appearance at the Apollo Theatre. He goes into details about what their act consisted of and talks about meeting their booking agent. Then, he remembers the groups various stage names and a financial situation that arose with their agent. Stiles talks about the reasoning for going to New York City without his parents and about the adventures he encountered during these trips. He talks about the famous performers he worked alongside during his career. Stiles then describes a situation in which he had to return home from the road and quit performing in order to go into the military during World War II. Albert B. Stiles recalls his relationship with his musical partner Nathaniel Reese and talks about how he learned of his untimely death.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:49 ?

Albert B. Stiles talks about getting drafted in the army and describes his experiences there. He then shares the story of how he met his wife. Then, he details a chronic foot ailment that started while he was in the army and the troubles it caused him throughout his life. Stiles discusses his reasoning for opening up a record shop after his military career ended. He describes the eventual failure of the business and about the financial troubles caused by the failure. Albert B. Stiles talks about his relationship with Lionel Hampton and getting back into the entertainment business.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:04 ?

Albert B. Stiles begins by telling the story of how he was accused of stealing while performing in Winnipeg, Canada. He talks about the details of this event and how he was affected by it. Then, he states how he came up with the idea to start the Talent Factory and gives some insight into his willingness to help up and coming entertainers. Albert B. Stiles details the early origins of the Talent Factory and also speaks about his admiration for his entertainment partner James Johnson. He discusses performers that he's trained at the Talent Factory and successes that they've had in the professional careers. Albert B. Stiles remembers working for the Flashfold Box Company and tells of the racism he encountered there.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_006, TRT: 0:26:30 ?

Albert B. Stiles details his participation in the International Printing Pressmen

Union, including how he came to be vice president of the union's chapter in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Stiles describes his struggles with the management of Flashfold Carton Inc, which intensified as Stiles increased his involvement in with the union. He describes how he brought a lawsuit against the company after they denied him overtime pay and forced him to switch shifts. Stiles then discusses his plans for the future of the Talent Factory, and then considers his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_001\_007, TRT: 0:13:56 ?

Albert B. Stiles describes photos of friends and family that he has provided.

Video Oral History Interview with Albert Stiles, Section A2002\_126\_Stiles\_Albert\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: 0:38:56