

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Thurbert Baker

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Baker, Thurbert E.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Thurbert Baker,
Dates:	August 15, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:08).
Abstract:	State attorney general Thurbert Baker (1952 -) served two consecutive terms in the Georgia House of Representatives before becoming the first African American elected as attorney general for the state of Georgia, where he initiated legislation in the General Assembly increasing penalties for domestic abuse cases. Baker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 15, 2003, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_193
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born December 16, 1952, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker was raised by his mother, Mary H. Baker, on a small rural farm. He attended public elementary and high schools in Rocky Mount and, in 1975, received a B.A. in political science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He graduated from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta in 1979.

From 1979 to 1985, Baker worked as a public defender before entering private practice. He was senior partner of the Baker and Shivers law firm from 1985 to 1997, during which time he won election to the Georgia House of Representatives, where he served from 1989 to 1997. He was named assistant floor leader for Governor Zell Miller in 1990 and floor leader in 1993.

Since 1997, Baker has served as the attorney general for the state of Georgia, the first African American to hold this position. Baker initiated the passage of legislation that increased penalties for domestic abuse cases, including a provision that made it a crime to commit an act of domestic violence in the presence of a child.

Baker serves on the executive committee of the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), is convenor of the NAAG Civil Rights Committee, and also served as chairman of NAAG's Conference on Violence Against Women. He is also an adviser to the Harrell Center for the study of domestic violence at the University of South Florida.

Baker has been a board member of the DeKalb County Library, the National Medical Society at Emory University, and the DeKalb College Foundation, and is a trustee of the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Baker, the 1975 Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) individual sabre champion, was recognized in 2002 by the ACC as one of the top fencers in conference history when named to its fiftieth anniversary fencing team.

Baker and his wife, Catherine, live in Stone Mountain, Georgia. They have two daughters, Jocelyn and Chelsea.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Thurbert Baker was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 15, 2003, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. State attorney general Thurbert Baker (1952 -) served two consecutive terms in the Georgia House of Representatives before becoming the first African American elected as attorney general for the state of Georgia, where he initiated legislation in the General Assembly increasing penalties for domestic abuse cases.

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:

Baker, Thurbert E.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Versfelt, Porter (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Baker, Thurbert E. --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Georgia

Occupations:

State Attorney General

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Thurbert Baker, August 15, 2003. 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 Thurbert Baker, Section A2003_193_001_001, TRT: 0:29:22 ?
Thurbert Baker describes his family background and childhood. Baker was born

December 16, 1952 in Edgecombe County, North Carolina. His parents divorced when he was young, and he knew little of his father except that his name was David and that he was from the area of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Baker's mother, Mary Helen Baker, was born March 17, 1933 in Edgecombe County to Hattie Wiggins Baker and her husband, who were tobacco, cotton, and peanut farmers. Mary worked in a laundromat before the family moved to Rocky Mount, where she was hired at a furniture factory, then a pharmaceutical manufacturer. Growing up, Baker spent his summers on his extended family's farm with his uncles William and Benjamin, and attended O.R. Pope Elementary School, Baskerville Elementary School, and Parker Junior High School in Rocky Mount. From an early age, he knew he wanted to become a lawyer, and his favorite television shows included 'Perry Mason.' Every Sunday, he attended Primitive Baptist Church with his family.

Video Oral History Interview with Thurbert Baker, Section A2003_193_001_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Thurbert Baker describes his school years in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. As a child, he attended St. James Baptist Church on Sundays, but he was not attentive. While out on his family's farm, he recalls listening to Motown records. His first-grade teacher at O.R. Pope Elementary School and his English teacher at Parker Junior High School were among his early influences, and he knew at a young age that he wanted to be a lawyer. Race relations were tense in Rocky Mount, where Martin Luther King, Jr. originally made his "I Have a Dream" speech before delivering it in Washington, D.C. When Booker T. Washington High School merged into Rocky Mount Senior High School in 1970, Baker, a sophomore at Booker T., joined student government. The first integrated class combined the schools' respective mascots, the lion and the blackbird, into the Rocky Mount Gryphons. HistoryMaker Jerry Butler performed at his prom. Graduating in 1972, Baker went on to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Video Oral History Interview with Thurbert Baker, Section A2003_193_001_003, TRT: 0:28:05 ?

Thurbert Baker describes his college and law school years. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) from 1972 to 1976, he was on the fencing team, and became the Atlantic Coast Conference Saber Champion. He explains that despite stereotypes, fencing is a diverse sport. He talks about some of UNC's other notable athletic programs, and his mentor, UNC Dean Hayden B. Renwick, who recruited minority students during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1976, after receiving his B.A. degree in political science, Baker attended Emory Law School in Atlanta, Georgia. There, he helped finance his law school education by working for Mayor Maynard Jackson, whom he describes as thoughtful and attentive. He received his J.D. degree in 1979 from Emory Law School and went to work as a public defender in Fulton County, Georgia before becoming regional counsel for the Environmental Protection Agency. After the EPA, he opened his own practice, Baker and Shivers, and in 1988, he ran for the Georgia House of Representatives.

Video Oral History Interview with Thurbert Baker, Section A2003_193_001_004, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Thurbert Baker talks about his political career. He was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1988, where he remained until 1997. After Zell Miller became governor in 1991, he made Baker his floor leader. As the governor's representative in the House, Baker was responsible for introducing all of Miller's legislative initiatives, including the HOPE Program, which provided full merit-based scholarships to in-state college students. In 1997, Miller made Baker Attorney General of Georgia. In this capacity, he began several anti-crime initiatives, including a three-strikes law with mandatory minimum sentences.

However, he also acknowledges racial disparities in the criminal justice system and talks about the role of families and communities in reaching out to at-risk youth. In 2003, he and then-Governor Sonny Perdue clashed over the Attorney General's constitutional role. Baker concludes by talking about his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his community service, and his legacy.