

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bertrand Miles

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Miles, Bertrand, 1928-2005
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bertrand Miles,
Dates:	September 13, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:54).
Abstract:	Photographer Bertrand Miles (1928 - 2005) worked as a both a staff and freelance photographer and his work can be found in many national publications. After retiring, Miles headed up the Miles Group, Inc., which was concerned with the restoration of the cultural history of Harlem and providing training and jobs for youth. Miles was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 13, 2004, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_159
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Photographer Bertrand Henry Miles was born September 17, 1928 in Fort Adams, Mississippi. His mother, Irma Mazique Miles, was from a family of medical doctors with roots on the island of Martinique. Young Miles grew up on the move. Sometimes living with his father, he attended school in Woodeville, Vidalia, Louisiana, and McCosh Elementary in Chicago. In Natchez, Mississippi he attended Broomfield High School, but graduated from Englewood High School in Chicago in 1948. Introduced to photography in high school, Miles was taught by professional photographers Carl Maynard and Carl Adair; eventually becoming Adair's assistant and moving with him to Atlanta, Georgia. Parting ways with Adair, Miles ran a “jook” for his father in Crosby, Mississippi through 1950.

Returning to Chicago, Miles helped in the family owned Billy's Restaurant and freelanced his photography. In 1952, he was offered a full time position by John H. Johnson as staff photographer for the New York City bureau of Johnson Publishing Company. Photographs by Miles appeared in Negro Digest, Ebony and Jet magazines. In 1953, Miles resigned from Johnson and recommended Moneta Sleet to fill his position. As a freelancer on Madison Avenue, he was able to publish photos in Life Magazine, Look Magazine and other publications. In 1968, Miles was hired as a cameraman by CBS Television, where he served until 1977. Miles is known for his portrait of Adam Clayton Powell, and his award-winning portrait of Mary Church Terrell at the Frederick Douglass Home at Cedar Hill.

For thirty-six years, including seven on the executive board, Miles was a member of local #600 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts and its allied sister union local #52. After retiring, Miles headed up the Miles Group, Inc., which was concerned with the restoration of the cultural history of Harlem and providing training and jobs for youth.

Miles passed away on February 1, 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bertrand Miles was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 13, 2004, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Photographer Bertrand Miles (1928 - 2005) worked as a both a staff and freelance photographer and his work can be found in many national publications. After retiring, Miles headed up the Miles Group, Inc., which was concerned with the restoration of the cultural history of Harlem and providing training and jobs for youth.

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:

Miles, Bertrand, 1928-2005

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Miles, Bertrand, 1928-2005--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Photographer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Bertrand Miles, September 13, 2004. 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 Bertrand Miles, Section A2004_159_001_001, TRT: 0:30:22 ?

Bertrand Miles was born on a houseboat on Lake Mary near Fort Adams, Mississippi on September 17, 1928. Miles' father, Henry Miles, fished Lake Mary, near the Mississippi River, for thirty years. Once, he aided two doctors from a nearby town, who offered Miles and his family free medical care from

that time on. Miles' father was a deacon and eventually owned a restaurant and juke joint. Miles' mother, Irma Mazique Miles, came from the well-known Mazique family in Mississippi, who were originally from Martinique and whose members were among the first to attend Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. The tradition of becoming doctors remained in the family; Miles recalls Maziques who were doctors at the time of the interview. When Miles was young, he was sent to board with two women in Woodville, Mississippi. In 1939, he went to live with an aunt in Chicago, Illinois, but returned home after a few months. In 1945, his parents divorced and he returned to Chicago and attended Englewood High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Bertrand Miles, Section A2004_159_001_002, TRT: 0:30:07 ?

Bertrand Miles grew up in Mississippi where he developed an entrepreneurial spirit from his father. He sold gym shoes to his peers and sold fish at the market with his father. Miles attended Natchez College for elementary school before briefly attending James McCosh Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois in 1939. He attended Brumfield High School in Natchez, Mississippi until he returned to Chicago in 1945 and entered Englewood High School. There, he excelled in his typing class, became interested in photography and embarked on an early freelance career by selling his photos of the school's proms. Miles recalls attending his own prom; unbeknownst to him, his date was his friend's girlfriend. After graduating from Englewood in 1948, Miles moved to Atlanta, Georgia with his boss, photographer Carl Adair. After ten months, he moved to Crosby, Mississippi with his father and girlfriend; during this time he told others he was married. While visiting his mother, he married his girlfriend but they soon divorced.

Video Oral History Interview with Bertrand Miles, Section A2004_159_001_003, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Bertrand Miles avoided being drafted into the Korean War by joining the National Guard. Miles met HistoryMaker John H. Johnson through mutual acquaintances, Kathryn and Earl Dickerson, and Johnson hired him as a photographer for the New York Bureau of Johnson Publishing Company. Miles moved to New York City in 1952 and met his second wife. Miles earned little money while working for Johnson and was fired after two years, but during that time, he shot many magazine covers and spreads for the company. After being fired, Miles recommended that photographer Moneta Sleet, Jr. be hired. Next, Miles freelanced and photographed for advertisements and album covers. He later worked as a photographer's assistant for Life magazine. Miles' work includes photographs of Mary Church Terrell, Eleanor Roosevelt, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and the March on Washington. He recalls the lengths he went to in order to take some of his photos and where his work is housed. He also talks about black photographers he met.

Video Oral History Interview with Bertrand Miles, Section A2004_159_001_004, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Bertrand Miles worked for Life magazine as a photographer's assistant. He also ran photography studios in Midtown Manhattan, New York City. He began working for CBS as a cinematographer in 1968. He was asked to cover riots in Cleveland, Ohio as his first assignment for the network; the footage aired on the evening news with Walter Cronkite. Miles retired from CBS in 1977 after being injured while working. He was to receive permanent partial disability insurance but when he turned sixty-five, the company stopped paying. Miles recalls a colleague who was also injured on the job while covering a Baptist convention in Florida. Miles became interested in revitalizing Harlem and attempted to purchase buildings in the neighborhood to open a barbecue restaurant, a new incarnation of Smalls Paradise and other ventures. He was especially interested

in elevating jazz with tribute statues and public listening stations, but lacked funds. Miles reflects upon his legacy and his friendship with HistoryMaker Gordon Parks.

Video Oral History Interview with Bertrand Miles, Section A2004_159_001_005, TRT: 0:28:21 ?
Bertrand Miles filmed the 1968 riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois as a cinematographer for CBS. He witnessed protestors being met with extreme violence from the police and National Guard and had a close encounter with the police himself. He also filmed the 1971 prison riot at Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York, during which over forty incarcerated men were killed by police. He recalls other stories he filmed for the network, including a story about a dying woman being visited by a doctor, a tea tester who was fired by President Nixon and a nervous union official. Miles decided to retire after hurting his back several times left him unable to carry his camera equipment. Miles describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.