

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Simeon Booker

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Booker, Simeon, 1918-2017
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker,
Dates:	August 1, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:08:58).
Abstract:	Magazine reporter and newspaper reporter Simeon Booker (1918 - 2017) worked for Johnson Publishing Company for fifty-three years, covering the Emmitt Till Murder and Trial, the Freedom Rides and the events of the Civil Rights Movement. Booker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 1, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_223
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Magazine and newspaper reporter Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr. was born on August 27, 1918, in Baltimore, Maryland to Roberta Waring and Simeon Saunders Booker, Sr., a YMCA director and minister. After his family moved to Youngstown, Ohio, Booker became interested in journalism through a family friend, Carl Murphy, the owner and operator of Baltimore's *The Afro American Newspapers*. In 1942, after receiving his B.A. degree in English from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Booker took a job at the *The Afro American Newspapers* as a young reporter. In 1945, he moved back to Ohio to work for the *Call and Post*. Five years later, Booker was the recipient of the Nieman Fellowship from Harvard University to study journalism and develop his talent as a reporter. After leaving Harvard in 1951, Booker became the first full-time black reporter at *The Washington Post*.

In 1954, Booker was hired by the Johnson Publishing Company to report on current events in its weekly digest, *Jet*. In 1955, Booker helped to redefine the role of *Jet* and the entire Civil Rights Movement with his famous coverage of the Emmett Till murder and trial, turning an all too familiar event in the Deep South into a national tragedy that united the black community. Booker remained on the dangerous front lines of the Civil Rights Movement, reporting on the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1961, Booker rode with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) Freedom Riders through the Deep South. When the buses were fire bombed in Anniston, Alabama, Booker arranged the Freedom Riders' evacuation with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Continuing his work of in-depth reporting, Booker toured Vietnam and interviewed General Westmoreland for *Jet* in the mid-1960s. In 1964, Booker outlined the importance of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement in his book, *Black Man's America*.

Booker covered every Presidential election since the Eisenhower Administration in his fifty-three years with Johnson Publishing until he retired in 2007. In 1982, Booker received one of the most prestigious awards in journalism, the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award.

Booker passed away on December 10, 2017 at age 99.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Simeon Booker was conducted by Paul Brock on August 1, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Magazine reporter and newspaper reporter Simeon Booker (1918 - 2017) worked for Johnson Publishing Company for fifty-three years, covering the Emmitt Till Murder and Trial, the Freedom Rides and the events of the Civil Rights Movement.

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:

Booker, Simeon, 1918-2017

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Booker, Simeon, 1918-2017 --Interviews

African American journalists--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Magazine Reporter

Newspaper 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 Simeon Booker, August 1, 2007. 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 Simeon Booker, Section A2007_223_001_001, TRT: 0:28:33 ?

Simeon Booker was born on August 28, 1918 in Baltimore, Maryland to Roberta Waring Booker and Simeon Booker, Sr. His maternal great-grandfather was a school superintendent in Washington, D.C., and Booker's father served as a YMCA secretary and the national president of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity in Baltimore. Booker's father moved his family to Youngstown, Ohio in 1925 to open the all-black West Federal Street YMCA, where Booker's mother managed the cafeteria, and Booker worked as a custodian. Later, his father became the pastor of Youngstown's Third Baptist Church. In Youngstown, Booker attended South High School, and wrote for the Buckeye Review newspaper. He received a scholarship from the YMCA to attend Youngstown College, where he faced racial discrimination. He transferred to Virginia Union University, where he funded his studies by writing news articles, and promoting the Homestead Grays baseball team. Upon graduation in 1942, Booker joined the staff of the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper.

African American families--Ohio--Youngstown.

African American parents--Ohio--Youngstown.

Brothers and sisters--Ohio--Youngstown.

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.).

African American students--Education (Secondary)--Ohio--Youngstown.

Depressions--1929.

Murphy, Carl, 1889-1967.

Afro American Newspapers.

Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker, Section A2007_223_001_002, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Simeon Booker briefly worked at the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper. He then moved to Cleveland, Ohio to work at the Call and Post, but was terminated for attempting to organize a union. He was awarded a Nieman Fellowship to study journalism at Harvard University, and afterwards joined the staff of The Washington Post as its first full-time African American reporter. After two years, Booker moved to Chicago, Illinois, and was hired by publishing executive John H. Johnson to work as a news editor at the Johnson Publishing Company. In 1955, Booker was assigned to cover the murder of Emmett Till for Jet magazine, and travelled to Money, Mississippi, where he had difficulty locating witnesses, because the African American community had been threatened to avoid the case. After that report, Booker was assigned more stories about the Civil Rights Movement, including the Freedom Rides. He recalls narrowly avoiding the attack on the Freedom Riders' bus in Anniston, Alabama.

African American reporters--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American reporters--Washington (D.C.).

Harvard University.

African American reporters--Ohio--Cleveland.

African American reporters--Illinois--Chicago.

Freedom Rides, 1961.

Till, Emmett, 1941-1955.

Afro American Newspapers.

Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker, Section A2007_223_001_003, TRT: 0:28:41 ?

Simeon Booker covered the integration of Central High School by the Little Rock Nine in 1959. He talks about the legacy of activist Daisy Bates, whom he met in Little Rock, Arkansas, as well as the legacies of other civil rights leaders.

Because of the danger of covering the Civil Rights Movement, Booker developed a relationship with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which warned him about the most dangerous areas in the South. At home in Washington, D.C., Booker wrote an opinion piece in 1963 in which he admonished the black football players at Washington, D.C.'s Eastern High School for their violence against fans from St. John's College High School. Despite facing criticism, he was appointed to the investigatory commission, and authored the final report about the incident. Booker was named the director of the Johnson Publishing Company bureau in Washington, D.C. He recalls his coverage of the Vietnam War, and the mentorship from Johnson Publishing Company executives John H. Johnson and Robert Johnson.

African Americans--Civil rights.

African American reporters.

Little Rock (Ark.)--Race relations.

Central High School (Little Rock, Ark.).

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

School integration--Arkansas--Little Rock.

Johnson, Robert E. (Robert Edward), 1922-1995.

Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker, Section A2007_223_001_004, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Simeon Booker earned a degree from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. After graduation, he resided in the Roosevelt Student Co-operative Housing Association in Cleveland, Ohio, where he became accustomed to living in a diverse community. He also formed a relationship with Cartha DeLoach, an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), who helped Booker avoid danger while covering the Civil Rights Movement. Despite his ties to the FBI, Booker was unafraid to criticize FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. He was acquainted with Robert Kennedy and President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and critiqued President Lyndon Baines Johnson for undoing civil rights advances. Booker also worked as radio commentator at the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company. He reflects upon his life and fifty-five year career as the longest-serving news bureau chief in Washington, D.C. He talks about the changes in the field of journalism; his wife, Carol McCabe Booker; and how he would like to be remembered.

Television personalities.

Westinghouse Broadcasting Company.

Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968.

African American reporters--Washington (D.C.).

African Americans in mass media.

African Americans--Marriage.

Publishers and publishing--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Simeon Booker, Section A2007_223_001_005, TRT: 0:11:58 ?

Simeon Booker narrates his photographs.