

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Billye Aaron

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Aaron, Billye Suber
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Billye Aaron,
Dates:	October 1, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:24:05).
Abstract:	Nonprofit executive and television personality Billye Aaron (1936 -) hosted 'Today in Georgia' and 'Billye,' and served as a regional vice president of the United Negro College Fund. Aaron was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 1, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_065
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nonprofit executive and television personality Billye Aaron was born on October 16, 1936 in Anderson County, Texas to Nathan Suber and Annie Mae Smith Suber. She attended Clemons School in Neches, Texas and later graduated from Lincoln High School in Dallas, Texas in 1954. In 1958, she graduated from Texas College in Tyler, Texas with her B.A. degree in English. She received a fellowship to attend Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated with her M.A. degree in 1960. Aaron continued her post-graduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

Aaron taught English in the Atlanta public school system, at Spelman College, Morehouse College, South Carolina State College and Morris Brown College. In 1968, she was hired as a co-host for WSB-TV's 'Today in Georgia,' becoming the first African American woman in the southeast to co-host a daily, hour-long talk show. In 1973, she married baseball legend Hank Aaron and began hosting her weekly talk show, 'Billye,' for WTMJ-TV. In 1980, she served as the development director for the Atlanta branch of the United Negro College Fund. Throughout her fourteen-year tenure with the organization, she co-hosted the annual telethon, 'Lou Rawls Parade of Stars,' co-founded the Mayor's MASKED Ball and became the second woman in the organization to serve as vice president of the southern region. After retiring in 1994, she and her husband started the Hank Aaron Chasing the Dream Foundation to award scholarships to assist the education of low-income children.

A longtime member of the NAACP, Aaron chaired its premiere fundraiser, the annual Freedom Fund Dinner, for five years. She was named director emeritus of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and has been honored with numerous awards for her service, including the 2003 Martin Luther King, Jr. "Salute to Greatness" and the YWCA Woman of Achievement award.

Aaron and her husband, Hank Aaron's children include Ceci Haydel, Aaron's daughter from her first marriage, and Gaile, Hank, Jr., Lary and Dorinda, from Hank Aaron's first marriage. They also have two grandchildren, Emily Jewel and Victor Aaron Haydel.

Billye Aaron was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 1, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Billye Aaron was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 1, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Nonprofit executive and television personality Billye Aaron (1936 -) hosted 'Today in Georgia' and 'Billye,' and served as a regional vice president of the United Negro College Fund.

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:

Aaron, Billye Suber

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

Aaron, Billye Suber--Interviews

African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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 Billye Aaron, October 1, 2016. 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 Billye Aaron, Section A2016_065_001_001, TRT: 1:27:52 ?

Billye Aaron was born on October 16, 1936 in Palestine, Texas to Annie Mae Smith Suber and Nathan C. Suber. Born in Neches, Texas, Aaron's mother was raised by farmers Peter Holloway and Lizzie Holloway Smith, who was Native American. Her family profited from the oil wells found on their property. Aaron's mother completed two years at Butler College in Tyler, Texas, and left school after meeting Aaron's father. His family was originally from Newberry,

South Carolina, and owned three hundred acres of farmland in Texas. After the death of Aaron's paternal grandfather, her grandmother, Hattie Goree Suber, continued to manage the land on her own. After marrying, Aaron's parents settled in Anderson County, Texas, where they raised Aaron and her seven siblings. She began her education at the Mound Prairie Institute, and then was bused to Clemons High School in Neches. There, she competed in the Interscholastic League, and won the junior declamation contest.

Video Oral History Interview with Billye Aaron, Section A2016_065_001_002, TRT: 2:30:28 ?

Billye Aaron attended Clemons High School in Neches, Texas, where she sang in the choir and competed on the debate team. Later, she transferred to Lincoln High School in Dallas, Texas, where she was mentored by music teacher Maurine F. Bailey and Principal T.D. Marshall. Aaron joined the Harry T. Burleigh Choir, and appeared on the local television show 'Look Who's Here,' which sparked her interest in television. After graduating in 1954, Aaron received a scholarship to attend Texas College in Tyler, Texas. Upon the advice of Dean Allen Hancock, she pursued a graduate degree in English at Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. There, she met professors Lynette Saine Gaines and Nathaniel P. Tillman. After graduation, Aaron taught at Spelman College for one year, and then secured a teaching position at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In 1959, she married Morehouse College professor Samuel Woodrow Williams, who was a confidant of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Billye Aaron, Section A2016_065_001_003, TRT: 3:30:23 ?

Billye Aaron taught for one year at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and then returned to Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, the city was beginning to desegregate with the assistance of the university presidents like Rufus Early Clement of Atlanta University, Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College and Albert E. Manley of Spelman College. In the early 1960s, student activists and civil rights leaders like Reverend William Holmes Borders fought to desegregate the city's buses and universities. Through her first husband, Reverend Samuel Woodrow Williams, Aaron became well acquainted with Coretta Scott King and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., although Williams often disagreed with Dr. King's nonviolent approach. Aaron first heard about Dr. King's shooting on 'The Huntley-Brinkley Report,' and immediately went to the King home to comfort Coretta Scott King as she was informed of her husband's death. Aaron also remembers the televised funeral for Dr. King later that week.

Video Oral History Interview with Billye Aaron, Section A2016_065_001_004, TRT: 4:30:15 ?

Billye Aaron was hired at WSB-TV in Atlanta, Georgia in 1968. With the support of anchor Ray Moore, she was selected to join Ruth Kent as the co-host of 'Today in Georgia.' In this role, she interviewed actress Jane Fonda, singer Pearl Bailey, and actors Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier. At this point, Aaron talks about her first husband, Samuel Woodrow Williams, and his membership in the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. After his death in 1970, Aaron married baseball player Hank Aaron in 1973. One year later, Aaron's husband surpassed Babe Ruth's home run record. When he was traded to the Milwaukee Brewers in 1975, the family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Aaron hosted the 'Billye' talk show, and met Wisconsin's Secretary of State Vel Phillips. Aaron also joined the board of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. In 1976, she and her husband returned to Atlanta, where she organized the 'Lou Rawls Parade of Stars' telethon for the United Negro College Fund.

Video Oral History Interview with Billye Aaron, Section A2016_065_001_005, TRT: 5:25:07 ?

Billye Aaron began working for the United Negro College Fund in 1980. In this capacity, she coordinated the 'Lou Rawls Parade of Stars' fundraiser and the UNCF Atlanta Mayor's Masked Ball. She also organized the NACCP Freedom Fund Dinner, which included celebrity attendees like actress Diahann Carroll and singers Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, Jr. Through the Hank Aaron Chasing the Dream Foundation, she and her husband, Hank Aaron, provided funding for music programs in Atlanta, Georgia. In partnership with the Major League Baseball organization, they also endowed scholarships at thirteen colleges and universities through the 44 Forever program. In 2017, Aaron and her husband gifted the Billye Suber Aaron Pavilion to the Morehouse School of Medicine. Aaron also talks about her husband's entrepreneurial ventures. She reflects upon her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and concludes the interview by describing her family and how she would like to be remembered.