

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lee Bey

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bey, Lee, 1965-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey,
Dates:	January 24, 2006 and January 27, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:10:09).
Abstract:	Architecture critic Lee Bey (1965 -) has written articles for the Daily Southtown and Chicago Sun-Times. He is the former Chicago Deputy Chief of Staff for Planning and Design and was Director of Media and Governmental Affairs for the architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Bey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 24, 2006 and January 27, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_003
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

African American writer and architectural critic Lee Bey was born on October 20, 1965 in Chicago, Illinois. Bey attended Lindbloom Technical High School. When Bey was fifteen years old, his father passed away. This became a turning point in his life, and he eventually transferred to Chicago Vocational School where he prepared for a career as a printing press operator. Motivated by a teacher's compliment about his writing, Bey decided to become a journalist.

Bey attended Chicago State University, where he worked under academic advisor Donda West and poet, author and Third World Press publisher, Haki Madhubuti. He then transferred to Columbia College's journalism department. After graduation, Bey began his professional career as a reporter for the City News Bureau of Chicago. He moved on to the *Daily Southtown* in 1990, and two years later became a general assignment reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. By 1997, Bey had become one of Chicago's foremost architectural critics alongside the *Chicago Tribune's* Blair Kamin, writing about issues of architecture and urban planning in his weekly column for the *Sun-Times*. He held this position until 2001, when he was selected as Deputy Chief of Staff for Planning and Design for Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. Under Daley, Bey became involved in a variety of issues that ranged from housing developments to architectural preservation.

Bey is an outspoken advocate of "new urbanism," the style of metropolitan development that favors integrated commercial and residential buildings, a grid-style layout, and a friendly, inviting design. Bey has also written regularly about various historical Chicago architectural sites on his website, www.leebey.com. He has presented before the American Institute of Architects, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Historical Society, and appeared on television programs including *Chicago Tonight* and *Fox News Chicago*. He has written for various architectural publications, including *Dwell* and *Architectural Record*, has contributed to *Chicago Architecture: History, Revisions, Alternatives*, *Visionary Chicago Architecture* and *20th Century Chicago: 100 Years, 100*

Voices.

Bey stepped down as Director of Media and Government Affairs for the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill on December 29, 2006 to pursue personal interests like completing his book, doing some consulting and working on photography and writing assignments. On August 1, 2007, Bey became the first African American Executive Director of the Chicago Central Area Committee, an influential, fifty-year-old civic organization composed of about seventy-five of Chicago's most prominent downtown businessmen who are concerned with the architecture, urban planning, transportation and economic viability of the Loop. He also teaches an architecture and politics class at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Bey was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 24, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lee Bey was conducted by Tracey Lewis on January 24, 2006 and January 27, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacam SP videocassettes. Architecture critic Lee Bey (1965 -) has written articles for the Daily Southtown and Chicago Sun-Times. He is the former Chicago Deputy Chief of Staff for Planning and Design and was Director of Media and Governmental Affairs for the architectural firm, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

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:

Bey, Lee, 1965-

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Bey, Lee, 1965---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Architecture Critic

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 Lee Bey, January 24, 2006 and January 27, 2006.
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 Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_001_001, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Lee Bey was born on October 20, 1965 in Chicago, Illinois to Lula Dixon Bey and Lee Bey, Sr. His paternal grandparents, Onnie Berry Bey and Claudis Bey, originated from Mississippi, and his grandfather changed his name to Bey after joining the Moorish Science Temple of America in the 1930s. Bey attended James Madison Elementary School until the fourth grade, at which point, his family moved to Avalon Park, and he enrolled at Charles P. Caldwell Elementary School. Overshadowed by his older sister, Bey struggled at Robert Lindblom Technical High School. After his father died, he transferred to Chicago Vocational High School, where his grades improved. Bey became interested in journalism, and began attending staff meetings of the Englewood Express newspaper. Unable to afford the tuition at Western Illinois University, Bey enrolled at Chicago State University instead. There, he was encouraged by the newspaper faculty advisor, Donda West, to study journalism at Columbia College.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Lee Bey often accompanied his father to the local Ace Hardware store, and on trips around the neighborhood to admire the architecture. After his father died in 1981, his mother closed the family store to become a home care aid. Bey worked over the summer to pay for night school classes, and was inspired by the eloquence of Harold Washington during the mayoral election. In 1983, Washington spoke at Bey's graduation from Chicago Vocational High School. Despite blatant racism during the campaign, Washington's mayoralty reassured Bey that he could achieve his dream of becoming a reporter. Bey joined the Tempo student newspaper at Chicago State University, and became close friends with the faculty advisor, Donda West as well as her mother, Lucille E. Williams and her son, rapper Kanye West. He also became acquainted with Haki Madhubuti at that time. Since Chicago State University lacked a journalism major, West encouraged Bey to apply to Columbia College, where he was mentored by Lester H. Brownlee.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Lee Bey graduated from Columbia College in 1988. His mentor, Lester H. Brownlee, arranged an interview for him at the City News Bureau of Chicago, a cooperative news agency that was founded in 1890. Bey adapted well to the rigorous environment, and learned to quickly assess a situation to form a report. He covered the criminal courts, before leaving in 1990 to begin a better paying internship at the Chicago Sun-Times. Bey befriended fellow intern Mary Mitchell, who went on to become a long time reporter and columnist with the Chicago Sun-Times. When Bey was not offered a position at the program's conclusion, Chicago Sun-Times Managing Editor Mary Dedinsky connected him with Earl Moses at the Southtown Economist, and Bey began work there in the fall. He reflects on the aftermath of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington's death in 1987. Bey also recalls meeting his future wife, Valencia Scott Bey, while covering the 1990 congressional race on the South Side.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Lee Bey worked in the Lansing, Illinois office of the Southtown Economist until 1992, when he accepted an offer from the Chicago Sun-Times. As a general

assignment reporter, he wrote a haunting series on child abuse, and covered the murder of Michael Jordan's father, James Jordan, Sr. in 1993. In 1994, along with Michael Sneed and Maureen O'Donnell, he investigated rumors of Congressman Mel Reynolds' sexual encounters with a minor. Initially, Bey feared that he was given the story because of his race, but he later accepted the assignment due to his previous experience covering Reynolds. He describes the emotional toll of the Reynolds case and trial, especially in the wake of his mother's death and his daughter's birth. Bey's piece on Lustron houses in Brookfield, Illinois prompted him to apply to be the Chicago Sun-Times' first architecture critic. He was also granted a column as part of an initiative to diversify the outlet's editorial staff, but he disliked being limited to black issues.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_001_005, TRT: 0:13:10 ?

Lee Bey was a part-time columnist Chicago Sun-Times when he wrote his first column about the rape, poisoning and assault of Girl X in Chicago's Cabrini-Green Homes. Angered by the lack of media coverage of the assault, Bey used his column to provide a more moderate voice than conservative writers like Shelby Steele and Armstrong Williams. The piece sparked outrage in the community and gained national attention, as the police searched for the offender. Bey went on to write a series titled 'Who Will Save the Children?' before transitioning to the architecture section of the Chicago Sun-Times. The new column allowed him to venture away from solely reporting on African American topics, although he continued to write about the beauty of the architecture in Chicago's African American communities like Englewood and Bronzeville. Bey talks about how his parents influenced his approach to African American issues.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_002_006, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Lee Bey wanted to talk about social issues in a new way, and used architecture to write articles about the history of various neighborhoods in Chicago, Illinois. His critiques of urban planning eventually earned him an architecture column. Bey was the youngest and the only African American architectural critic in the country, and he approached his pieces from his own news slant, which was unique from other writers. In 2000, Bey was honored with the Studs Terkel Award for his series on the architectural history of Chicago's Pullman neighborhood. When the Chicago Sun-Times began running his photograph alongside his column, Bey received an outpouring of support from the black community. At this point in the interview, Bey talks about the connection between Chicago's buildings and the character and identity of the city, the musical and architectural significance of Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church and his concerns about the preservation of black architectural history.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_002_007, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Lee Bey completed a series about urban sprawl during the summer of 2000. The following year, he was approached by Mayor Richard M. Daley's press secretary, Jacquelyn Heard, to join the mayor's office as the deputy chief of staff for planning and design. The birth of Bey's youngest child motivated him leave the Chicago Sun-Times for the stability and increased salary of the city government position. In this role, Bey learned about the political side of city development. He oversaw the remainder of the renovation plans for Soldier Field, which was widely panned by residents. Ultimately, the extensive changes caused the stadium to lose its standing with the National Register of Historic Places. At this point in the interview, Bey shares his critique of Soldier Field, and contrasts it with other historically significant Chicago buildings. He also talks about the vulnerability of African American landmarks in Chicago, and the destruction of buildings like the J. Jordan Building and the Knights of Pythias

Temple.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_002_008, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Lee Bey worked as the deputy chief of staff for planning and design for three years. He joined the efforts to preserve the historic Metropolitan Community Church when the original congregation sought to tear it down to construct a new facility. It was eventually purchased by Reverend Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr., and named a city landmark. In 2004, Bey became the director of governmental affairs at the Chicago-based architecture firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill LLP (SOM), where he handled proposals, and acted as a liaison between designers and city government. The new position allowed Bey to spend more time with his family. During this time, Bey discovered his passion for photography after buying a 1957 Argus C4 film camera. In 2004, he gave a lecture at University of Illinois at Chicago Circle's School of Architecture, and was asked to serve as an adjunct professor. Bey talks about the need to increase diversity in the architecture industry, and describes the characteristics of African American architecture.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_002_009, TRT: 0:29:07 ?

Lee Bey was working on the book 'The Paper Skyline: Plans That Never Got Off the Drawing Board' at the time of the interview. While conducting research, Bey found the original plans for the Ida B. Wells Homes, which featured more of an artistic design than the actual structures. Bey talks about New Urbanism, which was a movement to promote diverse living spaces that benefit all residents, as well as the attempts to revitalize the Chicago neighborhoods where buildings like Cabrini-Green Homes and Robert Taylor Homes once stood. He also describes how urban planning affects the sense of community in neighborhoods like Beverly and Englewood. He encourages young African Americans to study landscape architecture. Bey reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Bey, Section A2006_003_Bey_Lee_06_MED_001, TRT: