

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Orlando Bagwell

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Bagwell, Orlando |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Orlando Bagwell, |
| Dates: | December 17, 2007 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2007 |
| Physical Description: | 5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:00:12). |
| Abstract: | Documentary filmmaker Orlando Bagwell (1951 -) made Peabody Award-winning films; served as a staff producer for the PBS weekly program, <i>Frontline</i> ; produced a documentary on the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr.'s presidential campaign, "Running with Jesse," in 1988; and served as the executive producer for the not-for-profit WGBH Educational Foundation. Bagwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 17, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2007_339 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Documentary filmmaker Orlando Bagwell was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to Donald Bagwell, Sr. and Barbara Jones Bagwell in a family of seven. He attended Blessed Sacrament School in Baltimore. In 1969, his family moved to Nashua, New Hampshire, where he was a member of the Nashua High School football team. After graduating from high school, Bagwell pursued his B.S. degree in film at the Boston University. He completed his undergraduate studies in 1973 and furthered his education by earning his M.A. degree in broadcast journalism from Boston University in 1975.

In the early 1970s, Bagwell worked for the United South End Settlements (USES) and was active in the organization's after school program. He later became a substitute teacher for the South Boston Public School District where he taught political science and history. Bagwell was contracted by Boston's WGBH-TV to work as a film producer in 1975. In 1988, he served as a staff producer for the PBS weekly program *Frontline*. That same year, he produced a documentary on the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr.'s presidential campaign entitled *Running with Jesse*. In 1989, Bagwell founded the Boston based media company, Roja Productions, Inc. and produced *Roots of Resistance: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. From 1991 until 1994, Bagwell was the executive vice president for the *Eyes on the Prize* PBS documentary series on the Civil Rights Movement. He produced episodes of the Blackside series entitled *Mississippi: Is this America?* and *Ain't Scared of Your Jails* for which he received the Alfred DuPont Award and the Peabody Award. In 1995, Bagwell served as the executive producer for the not-for-profit WGBH Educational Foundation, and in 1999, he produced the six hour documentary called *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery*.

Bagwell became the program officer for the Ford Foundation's Media Arts and Culture unit in 2004. He works with the unit's director and oversees international operations to accomplish the foundation's goals.

Orlando Bagwell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 17, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Orlando Bagwell was conducted by Adrienne Jones on December 17, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Documentary filmmaker Orlando Bagwell (1951 -) made Peabody Award-winning films; served as a staff producer for the PBS weekly program, *Frontline*; produced a documentary on the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr.'s presidential campaign, "Running with Jesse," in 1988; and served as the executive producer for the not-for-profit WGBH Educational Foundation.

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:

Bagwell, Orlando

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bagwell, Orlando--Interviews

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews

African American television producers and directors--Interviews

Bourne, St. Claire, 1943-2007

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Documentary Filmmaker

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 Orlando Bagwell, December 17, 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 Orlando Bagwell, Section A2007_339_001_001, TRT: 0:05:27 ?

Orlando Bagwell remembers documentary filmmaker St. Clair Bourne, who had recently passed away at the time of the interview. Bagwell was first exposed to Bourne's films, which focused on African American social issues and themes, while a student at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts. Later, Bagwell met Bourne while working as a cameraman on a film set in New England. He talks about Bourne's mentorship, filmmaking philosophy and influence upon Bagwell's career.

African American motion picture producers and directors--Interviews.

African American television producers and directors--Interviews.

Bourne, St. Claire, 1943-2007.

Mentoring.

Video Oral History Interview with Orlando Bagwell, Section A2007_339_001_002, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Orlando Bagwell was born in Baltimore, Maryland to Barbara Jones Bagwell and Donald Bagwell, Sr. His maternal great-great-grandmother, Alice Sampson, was Cherokee, and a direct descendent of President James Buchanan. Bagwell's paternal grandparents died of tuberculosis when his father was a child, after which he was raised in an orphanage for a time, and then adopted by an aunt and uncle. Bagwell's paternal family was originally from Virginia, but moved to Baltimore, where both his parents grew up. They met there in high school and married after his father's return from World War II. During Bagwell's youth, his parents studied at Baltimore's Morgan State College; and his maternal great-grandmother, Estella Sampson Hawkins, helped to raise him and his four siblings during that time. After graduating, his mother became a psychologist, and his father became a physicist. Bagwell learned the importance of education from his parents; and was also influenced by his paternal aunts, all of whom had successful careers.

Baltimore, (Md.)--Social life.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.

World War, 1939-1945--African Americans.

Korean War, 1950-1953--African Americans.

African Americans--Childhood and youth--Maryland--Baltimore.

African Americans--Relations with Indians.

Video Oral History Interview with Orlando Bagwell, Section A2007_339_001_003, TRT: 0:24:25 ?

Orlando Bagwell grew up in the Wilson Park neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland. His family was active in the community, and often distributed political flyers to their neighbors. Bagwell spent the holidays with his family members who lived nearby, and his parents' classmates from Baltimore's Morgan State College also gathered frequently in Bagwell's home. He attended the private, mostly white Blessed Sacrament School. As one of the few African American students, Bagwell was excluded from field trips to the local, segregated amusement park. He also encountered difficulties from his teachers, who failed him for writing with his left hand. As a child, Bagwell aspired to become a lawyer or doctor. Politics and the Civil Rights Movement were common topics of discussion in his family, and his parents were both involved in the city's civil rights activities. They listened to the speeches of Malcolm X and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who spoke at his mother's commencement from Morgan State College.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.

Blessed Sacrament Church (Baltimore, MD.).

Civil rights movements--Maryland--Baltimore.

Segregation--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American children--Social life and customs--Maryland--Baltimore.

African Americans--Education (Primary)--Maryland--Baltimore.

Morgan State University.

Video Oral History Interview with Orlando Bagwell, Section A2007_339_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Orlando Bagwell grew up listening to the music of Motown on the radio. While he later became a filmmaker, he did not watch much television or film. Instead, Bagwell spent his time playing football and baseball in neighborhood leagues with his friends in Baltimore, Maryland. Following his parents' graduation from Baltimore's Morgan State College, Bagwell's family moved to Nashua, New Hampshire to escape the dangers of segregation. There, Bagwell attended Nashua High School, but felt that the school was not sufficiently challenging. His academic performance suffered until his senior year, when he began to focus on his classes and future. Receiving no help from his high school guidance counselor, he researched schools on his own, eventually enrolling at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts to study biology. However, after realizing his personality was not suited to work in a hospital, Bagwell took a leave of absence to work for the United South End Settlements, where he was inspired to make films.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Documentary films.

Boston University.

African Americans--Religion.

Civil rights movements.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--New Hampshire.

African American families--New Hampshire.

African American college students--Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Orlando Bagwell, Section A2007_339_001_005, TRT: 0:31:13 ?

Orlando Bagwell enrolled in the film program at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts, where many professors found his work to be lacking, although his films elicited strong emotions from his audiences. While in school, Bagwell continued to work as a program director at the United South End Settlements. In this role, Bagwell ran the after-school program, where he taught photography and film classes, and helped students to create their own films about their lives and neighborhoods. Bagwell befriended many of the cameramen working in the Boston area; and, through these connections, found work as an assistant cameraman at local television stations. One of his first paid positions was as an assistant cameraman on the PBS special 'Say Brother.' During this time, Bagwell also created independent films, and received a grant from the American Film Institute. Later, Bagwell became a filmmaker for Blackside, Inc. and the director of the Ford Foundation in New York City.

American Film Institute--Awards.

WETA-TV (Television station: Washington, D.C.).

Blackside, Inc.

Boston University.

Vocational guidance.

African American college students--Massachusetts--Boston.

Independent filmmakers--United States.

Public television--United States.