

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Clarence Avant

PERSON

Avant, Clarence

Alternative Names: Clarence Avant;

Life Dates: February 25, 1931-

Place of Birth: Climax, North Carolina, USA

Residence: Beverly Hills, CA

Occupations: Music Executive

Biographical Note

Music executive Clarence Avant was born on February 25, 1931 in the small town of Climax, North Carolina. He went to school through his junior high years in a one-room school house before attending James B. Dudley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina. At the age of sixteen, Avant decided to move to New Jersey to live with his aunt and cousin. He began working as a manager at Teddy P's Lounge, owned by Teddy Powell, where he met the blues artist Little Willie John. Little Willie John was so impressed by Avant that he asked him to be his road manager, and more clients soon followed. In 1967, Avant helped sign William Stevenson with MGM, engineering the first joint venture between an African American artist and a major record company with the incorporation of Venture Records, Inc into MGM Records in California.

Avant was known in the business world as a great deal-maker, and in 1968, Al Bell enlisted his help to sell Stax Records to Gulf & Western. The deal was finalized for \$4.3 million. The next year, Avant founded Sussex Records and bought the KAGB-FM radio station in 1973, both ventures closed in 1975. However, Avant had realized his passion for the music business and founded Tabu Productions in 1976. In 1987, Avant helped to promote Michael Jackson's first solo tour which grossed \$125 million. He was named Chairman of the Board of Motown Records in 1993. One year later, Avant worked with a group of other notable African American investors to create a \$20 million investment partnership in South Africa called New Age Beverages. New Age partnered with PepsiCo to build a bottling plant in South Africa, which would be completely run by South Africans.

Avant, along with Quincy Jones, received the Thurgood Marshall Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Morehouse College in 2003 and received the Living Legends Foundation Award in 2007. In 2010,

he was inducted into the NAACP Hall of Fame. He has become known as the “Godfather” in the music business because of his willingness to aid newcomers in the industry. Through his mentoring, many of these people have become very successful and prestigious leaders in the business. Avant currently lives with his wife, Jacqueline, in Beverly Hills, California.

Avant was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 14-15, 2012.

Related Entries

James B. Dudley High School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Teddy P's Lounge [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1950 to ?]

Manager

Delete [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1967 to 1970]

Artist Management/Broker

Sussex Records [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1969 to 1975]

Founder and CEO

Avant Garde Broadcasting [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1970 to ?]

Founder and CEO

Tabu Records [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1963 to ?]

Founder and CEO

Motown Records [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1991 to 1993]

Chairman

Urban Box Office Network [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1955 to ?]

Chairman

Interior Music [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 200004 to ?]

Founder and CEO

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund [MEMBEROf]
[from 1969 to 1975]

Board Member

