

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bobby Bennett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Bennett, Bobby
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett,
Dates:	September 10, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:10:02).
Abstract:	Radio dj Bobby Bennett (1943 - 2015) worked at several radio stations in Washington, D.C. from the 1960s to the 1990s. He also created the 'Soul Street' channel for XM Satellite Radio, and served as its program director for seven years. Bennett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 10, 2014, in Punta Gorda, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_188
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio DJ Bobby Bennett was born on July 20, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From a young age, Bennett knew that he wanted to be a radio DJ. Following high school, he enrolled in a broadcasting school in Pittsburgh.

In 1967, Bennett worked as a news reporter for Pittsburgh's WAMO-AM and WZUM radio stations. One year later, in 1968, he moved to WOL-AM in Washington, D.C., where he became known to radio fans as “The Mighty Burner” and hosted a show until 1980. Bennett then hosted a sports talk show on WTOP in the early 1980s, and served as program director for WHUR-FM from 1987 to 1992. After his time at WHUR, Bennett was hired as a morning talk show host at WXTR; and, in 1997, he became the host of an R&B radio show on WPFW-FM. In 2000, Bennett created the “Soul Street” channel for XM Satellite Radio, and served as its program director until 2010. During his career, he also was employed as a record executive and as a voice over narrator.

Bennett was the co-author of *The Ultimate Soul Music Trivia Book: 501 Questions and Answers About Motown, Rhythm & Blues, and More*, which was published in 1997. In 1988, Bennett was presented with several awards from Washington, D.C., Maryland and Pennsylvania. In 1972, he was named *Billboard* magazine’s R&B Disc Jockey of the Year, and, in 1973, was recognized as Disc Jockey of the Year by the *Gavin Report*.

Bennett passed away on September 8, 2015 at age 72.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bobby Bennett was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 10, 2014, in Punta Gorda, Florida, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Radio dj Bobby Bennett (1943 - 2015) worked at several radio stations in Washington, D.C. from the 1960s to the 1990s. He also created

the 'Soul Street' channel for XM Satellite Radio, and served as its program director for seven years.

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:

Bennett, Bobby

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Champagne, Curt (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Bennett, Bobby--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio DJ

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 Bobby Bennett, September 10, 2014. 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 Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_001, TRT: 1:28:56 ?

Bobby Bennett was born on July 20, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Flavia Sloan Payne and Marshall Payne, Jr. Bennett's maternal grandfather, Mark Sloan, Sr. migrated from the heavily segregated Greenville, South Carolina to Pittsburgh, where he became the first African American mail carrier in the State of Pennsylvania. Bennett's Native American maternal grandmother, Marguerite Tapsico Sloan, worked as a cook for Lorenz Iversen, who was the president of Mesta Machine Company. Bennett's paternal grandfather, Marshall Payne, Sr., was employed at the United States Steel Corporation. His paternal grandmother, Lila Lewis Payne, was also Native American, and wore her traditional attire each year on the Fourth of July. Bennett's parents met at a dance, and married just before his father was drafted into the U.S. military during World War II. After the war, his father enlisted in the newly formed U.S. Air Force while his mother worked as a dietary supervisor at Montefiore Hospital.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_002, TRT: 2:28:21 ?

Bobby Bennett's father, Marshall Payne, Jr. left the U.S. military in 1954 after serving in the Korean War. Bennett was raised in a housing project in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he began his education at Dilworth Elementary School. As a child, Bennett was a successful baseball player, and was chosen to participate in the semifinals of the Little League Baseball World Series in Hagerstown, Maryland. There, he experienced segregation for the first time when he forced to stay in Washington, D.C. forty miles away. While at Gladstone High School, Bennett was encouraged by his history teacher Ted Soens to read Time magazine, and learn about current world events. During this time, he also worked at a local clothing store. When Bennett vocalized his interest in becoming a disc jockey, the majority of his family was not supportive with the exception of his mother, Flavia Sloan Payne. Additionally, Bennett describes his brothers and their careers, and remembers his maternal great uncle Herbert Lewis.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_003, TRT: 3:30:23 ?

Bobby Bennett considered playing for the St. Louis Cardinals' D league team as a teenager; but when he was unable to hit a curveball during try outs, he decided not to pursue professional baseball any further. Nevertheless, Bennett went on to be featured in the Pittsburgh Courier as student athlete of the week in basketball. He attended Gladstone High School until his family moved to the Homestead neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he enrolled at Westinghouse High School. Inspired by local disc jockeys like Sir Walter, Bill Powell, Harold Brown and Porky Chedwick, Bennett decided to pursue his interests in radio, initially running errands for radio station managers. Upon graduating, he accepted an internship at Western Electric Company, where he met WAMO Radio disc jockey Al Germany, who invited him onto his show. Bennett was then hired for a news segment, and promoted to a radio host position six months later. Additionally, he talks about the music industry in Pittsburgh.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_004, TRT: 4:29:22 ?

Bobby Bennett worked at WAMO Radio in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania before moving to its competitor WZUM Radio, where he became known for playing popular music as well as lesser known songs. In 1969, Bennett moved to Washington, D.C., where he was offered a position at WOL Radio. At that point, he was drafted into the Vietnam War, but was ultimately deferred for medical reasons. After returning to the station, Bennett became an overnight radio host before eventually moving to an afternoon time slot. During this time, he also completed coursework at a local broadcasting school. Bennett received his famed nickname The Mighty Burner from fellow disc jockey Bob "Nighthawk" Terry. At this point in the interview, Bennett talks about the accuracies and inaccuracies of the James Brown biopic 'Get on Up' as well as fictionalized portrayals of the 1960s R&B era like 'Five Heartbeats' and 'Dreamgirls.' He also talks about radio talk show host Petey Greene and the influence disc jockey Al Germany had on his career.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_005, TRT: 5:27:25 ?

Bobby Bennett became an afternoon radio host at WOL Radio in Washington, D.C. in 1969. In the beginning of his career, he met notable musicians and groups, like Duke Fakir of the Four Tops, The Jackson 5 and Kool and the Gang. During his twelve year tenure at WOL Radio, Bennett went on to meet and befriend a variety of artists including Johnnie Taylor, Al Green, Barry White, and Marilyn McCoo and Bill Davis, Jr. of The 5th Dimension. At this point in the interview, Bennett recalls hosting an event, where Sly Stone was the

headliner. Stone arrived late to the venue and made insulting statements toward Bennett, which were overheard and later published in an article. In support of Bennett, WOL Radio and other local deejays stopped playing music by Sly and the Family Stone, but eventually resumed after they were approached by promoters from Stone's record label, Capitol Records. In addition, Bennett describes changes in the radio industry and his efforts to avoid payola corruption.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_006, TRT: 6:29:44 ?

Bobby Bennett became the program director of WHUR Radio in Washington, D.C. in 1987. He also worked as an afternoon anchor with the likes of disc jockey Dyana Williams, freelance photographer David "Oggi" Ogburn and Melvin Lindsey, who pioneered the Quiet Storm R&B format. In the late 1960s, Bennett befriended musician Chuck Brown of Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers, and began working with the band The Young Senators. After leaving WHUR Radio, he spent two years in the record promotion department at Capitol Records in New York City. In 1992, Bennett returned to the radio industry as a host at WXTR Radio in Washington, D.C. During this time, he also organized cruise concerts on the Potomac River. Bennett briefly worked at WPFW Radio, where he was given full control of his format and song choices. In 2000, he was approached by XM Satellite Radio, Inc. to create their 'Soul Street' channel and function as its program director. Additionally, Bennett talks about go-go music in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Bobby Bennett, Section A2014_188_001_007, TRT: 7:15:51 ?

Bobby Bennett retired from XM Satellite Radio, Inc. in 2010, and moved to Punta Gorda, Florida in 2011. Bennett talks about the future of the radio industry, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also talks about his wife, Connie Payne, their children, Amy Payne and Eric Payne, Sr., and their grandchildren. To conclude the interview, Bennett reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered.