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Guide to the Bob Bailey oral history interview

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Summary Information

Repository: University of Nevada, Las Vegas. University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives.
Creator: Bailey, William Henry, 1927-2014
Contributor: UNLV University Libraries Oral History Collection
Title: Bob Bailey oral history interview
ID: OH-00097
Date: 1978 March 16
Physical Description: 2 Digital Files (0.0329 GB) MP3, PDF/A
Language of the Material: English
Abstract: Oral history interview with William Bailey conducted by Betty Rosenthal on March 16, 1978 for the Ralph Roske Oral History Project on Early Las Vegas. Mr. Bailey, who came to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1955, discusses his experiences in the entertainment business. He also discusses discrimination that African-Americans experienced in Las Vegas.

Preferred Citation

William Bailey, 1978 March 16. OH-00097. [Cite format consulted: Audio recording or Transcript.] Oral History Research Center, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

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Scope and Contents Note

Oral history interview with William Bailey conducted by Betty Rosenthal on March 16, 1978 for the Ralph Roske Oral History Project on Early Las Vegas. Mr. Bailey, who came to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1955, discusses his experiences in the entertainment business. First employed as an assistant producer and master of ceremonies in the first interracial hotel in Nevada, the Moulin Rouge, he describes the impact that hotel had on black entertainers during its brief existence. He tells how the Moulin Rouge's three show policy made the hotel the after hours meeting place for Strip entertainers where black and white entertainers could fraternize. He lists famous Black performers who played the Moulin Rouge and declares, "Everybody who was big played here." Bailey says the hotel brought life to the Westside where, in 1955, there were only a few telephones

and the streets were largely unpaved. He ascribes the failure of the hotel after only a few months operation to mismanagement.

Bailey subsequently became a local radio and television personality and that role, for the most part, allowed him to circulate in the hotels and casinos without difficulty while other black entertainers and spectators were denied entry. He reminisces about the indignities suffered by such black stars as: Josephine Baker, the Treniers, Nat King Cole, Billy Eckstein, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Diana Washington. S

Because of discrimination in booking, Bailey says blacks rarely were an opening act on the Strip, and it wasn't until 1963 that blacks were employed in any numbers in Strip lounges, although in the fifties such stars as Sarah Vaughn, Delia Reese, and the Ink Spots had played the lounges. Bailey's wife, Ann Bailey, was the first Black girl dancer on the Strip in the 1961 production, "Nymphs of the Nile."

Bailey claims responsibility for the descriptive phrase applied to Las Vegas, the Mississippi of the West. He says the basic tenor of Las Vegas is still one most Black casino/hotel employees are from the South and conditioned to discrimination and because casino management is reluctant to offend high rollers from the South by equality of treatment, discrimination and de facto segregation continue in Las Vegas. Bailey points out that downtown Las Vegas rarely employed black acts and appeals to a clientele drawn by country music, thus effectively eliminating blacks from downtown casinos.

Appointed by Gov. Grant Sawyer to the Nevada State Equal Rights Investigatory Commission in 1961, Bailey served as its chairman and traveled throughout the state holding hearings. He tells about his work on the commission and how discrimination in housing personally affected him then.

Digital audio and transcript available.

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Administrative Information

Access Note

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Acquisition Note

Materials were donated in 1978 by Betty Rosenthal; accession number 78-65.

Processing Note

Interview materials were processed by UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives in 2016. Minaam Baseer wrote the collection description. The audio cassette(s) for this interview have been reformatted by an external vendor into a digital format. MP3 files of the audio are available for research use.

Bound Transcript Availability

A bound transcript is available for use in UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives: F849.L35.B35

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Names and Subjects

- Oral histories (document genres)
- African Americans -- Las Vegas (Nev.)
- Segregation -- Nevada
- Race discrimination
- Entertainment -- Nevada -- Las Vegas
- Moulin Rouge (Hotel-Casino : Las Vegas, Nev.)