

National Civil Rights Museum

Ex-radical, now judge, feels the old fire still

By Michael Lollar
The Commercial Appeal

The FBI's dossier on D'Army Bailey shows he was investigated in the 1960s and 1970s as a security threat to President Lyndon Johnson and as a possible "Communist infiltrator" and Black Panther Party sympathizer.

"It's a flight of fantasy, just another bizarre incident of the time," says Judge Bailey of the inch-thick file he got through the Freedom of Information Act. For him, it's another closed-but-not-forgotten chapter in the civil rights movement.

The yellowing dossier traces his arrest as a student protest organizer in Baton Rouge, La., as an activist-lawyer and as a radical Californian elected to the Berkeley City Council in 1971. "Those were exciting, fun times," says Judge Bailey, veteran of the civil rights movement and president of the National Civil Rights Museum.

He gladly relives those memories as he digs through his

attic archives. A neatly landscaped lawn surrounds the stately brick home in Hein Park; downstairs, a meatloaf is baking, and sons Justin, 12, and Merritt, 10, play Nintendo on a big-screen TV.

Bailey also is a Circuit Court judge, and at 49 bears little resemblance to the indignant young lawyer cataloged in his attic.

"If you don't change with time, you stand rigid against the wind and will be ripped out like the trees," he says. If the FBI had persisted, it would have traced his career from Berkeley hell-raiser back to Memphis. Here he returned to practice law in 1974 with his brother, County Commissioner Walter Bailey.

He married Adrienne Leslie, former regional cosmetics sales representative; in 1983 he came in fourth in the Memphis mayoral race. He got a respectable crossover white vote that showed a flair for what Rep. Harold Ford of Memphis calls "good coalition politics." He would form a krewes as part of Carnival Memphis's historically

white secret societies and, last year, was elected to the judgeship.

"It hurts sometimes when you look at what still has to be done," he says. When he and his wife were not invited to some Carnival Memphis parties in East Memphis and as rising Carnival fees excluded much of the black community, he quit his Grand Krewe of the Nile.

Unlike the old days, he didn't "make a big ruckus over it. There were other fish to fry and other battles to be fought." As a priority, that social slight doesn't compare, he says, to alcohol, drugs, family disintegration "and the rest of the demons within our own community."

He was born in South Memphis in 1941, the son of a house painter who became a Pullman porter for the Illinois-Central Railroad and of a maid who would become a licensed practical nurse. He grew up on Ford Place in what the FBI defined as a "substantial family."

He and brother Walter, a year



D'Army Bailey

older, were "fairly well-sheltered," says their mother, Will Ella Bailey. They sat where they pleased in a black neighborhood theater, and she didn't expose them to segregated lunch counters.

Like their father, who died three years ago, they went to the private Rosebud School, a black school, then to LaRose Elementary and Booker T. Washington High School.

D'Army Bailey wrote columns for his high school newspaper, the Tri-State Defender and the old Memphis World. Summers

and after school, he held jobs as a receptionist for a black doctor and as a drugstore deliveryman. He did a teenage radio "roundup," helped a grandfather build houses and worked as an orderly at John Gaston Hospital. "In every job, I was exposed to strong, productive men. They took life as it was and met the challenge."

He, and the FBI, say there was nothing "that really set me off" in those years. It was in 1962, as a student at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., when occasional "quiet anger" grew into part of the movement. His brother, on a football scholarship, was allowed to finish at Southern, but D'Army was expelled in 1962 as a demonstration leader.

He enrolled at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., then Yale University Law School. His activism earned the FBI description "militant young Negro." In 1967, he spent a year in New York as national director of the Law Students Civil Rights Research Council, then as a consumer protection lawyer in San Francisco and served on the Berkeley City Council from 1971 to 1973.

In that epicenter of activism, he had a reputation as a black nationalist who angered even fellow radicals. The 1978 book *Experiment and Change* in Berkeley said Bailey referred to

a black moderate councilman as "Uncle Willie," the moderate mayor as the city's "chief pig" and a fellow radical councilman as "a spokesperson for the white ruling class."

During a summer recess, when his student supporters were away, a recall vote forced him off the council.

And back to Memphis. Much of the early rhetoric was for effect, Judge Bailey now says. "But I do know the same spirit and the same fire in the belly that kept me going these 30 years still burns."

His wife, community relations and volunteer coordinator for the Memphis Food Bank, says the museum has consumed much of her husband's time. "Someone said the other day, 'I'll bet you'll be glad when it's finished so you can take a breather.' But there won't be a breather. There's always another project."

For Judge Bailey, it could be a future run for mayor, although, he said, "I'm not counting my days toward any one political objective." He may finish a book on the movement, teach, go fishing with his sons or come out fighting in whatever role it takes to bring change. As he says of his California political tactics: "You've got a duty to be clever enough to take maximum advantage of the leverage you've got."

Expert's vision first gave form to project in '86

By Wayne Risher
The Commercial Appeal

Critics have decried it as morbid and tasteless, but the laser beam following the path of an assassin's bullet is scheduled to be in place when the National Civil Rights Museum is dedicated Thursday.

The laser and less controversial exhibits in the \$9.25 million museum are reflections of Benjamin Lawless's five-year vision for the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed.

Lawless, a former Smithsonian Institution official, produced a 1986 report that became the blueprint for the Lorraine's conversion into the nation's first comprehensive exhibit tracing the American civil rights movement.

Architects, exhibit designers, engineers and contractors built on the foundation that Lawless and his team laid in about three months during 1986. The cast of characters in the museum's development has ranged from a Gallatin, Tenn., firm that outfits buses for country music stars to a Springfield, Va., company that makes laser shows.

The museum's completion has been delayed by state government's bidding process and an unusually rainy spring.

The partially completed museum will be dedicated and opened for free tours Thursday. It will remain open until Sunday, then close while the exhibits are completed. Officials hope to open the completed museum by Labor Day.

Areas or exhibits scheduled to be finished before the dedication include Rooms 306 and 307, which were associated with Dr. King's final hours; the People of Memphis exhibit, including a 1968-vintage garbage truck, a laser light tracing the path of the bullet that killed Dr. King; a courtyard that is overlooked by the King rooms; graphics of civil rights history in a changing exhibits gallery; a partially stocked gift shop; and an auditorium, where an introductory film will be shown.

It all started in 1985, when the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation received feasibility studies for a civil rights center at the Lorraine. Lawless was the only one of five bidders who included specific ideas for a civil rights center, recalled Ann Abernathy, a former Center City Commission employee who worked with the foundation from 1985 to 1988.

Lawless, who plans to celebrate his 66th birthday at the dedication Thursday, came to the project with sterling credentials: nearly 30 years directing exhibitions at the Smithsonian, "the Nation's Attic."

His first impression of the Lorraine? "Pretty gloomy. It was terrible. It looked pretty seedy. But that didn't bother me. I thought we could renovate it and make it historic."

Rather than telling the

foundation how he would do a feasibility study, "I took a leap of faith and showed them how I would do it (the museum) if I got the job," Lawless said recently from his office in Fort Washington, Md.

To create a story line for the museum, he went to black historians Spencer Crew, a Smithsonian curator, and James Horton, a history professor at George Washington University.

"Together we sat around and doped out this notion of what the story line ought to be. We really wanted to tell the story of the little person who was on the marches, who suffered the indignities."

Earlier plans contemplated tearing down the Lorraine and erecting a new building to house the museum.

"It never occurred to me to tear it down," said Lawless. "A horrible thing happened there, but I just think it's one of the more historic places in the United States, right up there with Gettysburg."

His original proposal included at least seven of the 15 main

"It never occurred to me to tear (the Lorraine Motel) down," said museum design consultant Benjamin Lawless. "A horrible thing happened there, but I just think it's one of the more historic places in the United States, right up there with Gettysburg."

exhibits that visitors will see: "Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education"; "Bus Boycott, 1956"; "Student Sit-ins, 1960"; "Birmingham Jail, 1963"; "Freedom Rides, 1961"; "Mass Protest Marches, 1963-1968"; and "The People of Memphis."

His proposal became ammunition in the foundation's successful bid for funding in the spring of 1986: State of Tennessee, \$4.4 million; City of Memphis, \$2.2 million; Shelby County, \$2.2 million. Four years later, each government provided an additional \$150,000 when bids exceeded estimates.

The state eventually agreed to manage construction and turn over the finished facility to the foundation.

The Lorraine was closed on Jan. 10, 1988, and its last resident, Jacqueline Smith, was evicted on March 2. She began



Jeanette Shumport prays for Jacqueline Smith before Shelby County sheriff's deputies removed Ms. Smith from her protest site on the sidewalk in front of the Lorraine Motel last July 16.

living on the sidewalk to protest the project.

State Architect Mike Fitts, chief staff officer for the State Building Commission, was named state project coordinator.

Work began after a ceremonial groundbreaking on Jan. 27, 1989. Jimmy A. Patton Contractor Inc. of Little Rock removed asbestos from the motel buildings and tore down other structures in the block.

The state paid Bricks Inc. \$438,000 to renovate the hotel building at Huling and Mulberry to serve as an administration building for the museum.

Jameson-Vaccaro Construction Co. was hired to renovate the motel and build an adjoining museum to house the exhibit galleries. It received the biggest contract of the museum project, about \$4.1 million.

Last summer, Jameson-Vaccaro officials were cast as "the bad guys," said company executive Tony Vaccaro, when they went to court to have Jacqueline Smith and her belongings moved off the sidewalk adjoining the construction site. Ms. Smith's supporters moved her belongings to the other side of Mulberry Street, where she remains.

While work proceeded at the Lorraine, the exhibits were taking shape outside the city.

State officials initially negotiated with Lawless, who wanted to be the exhibit designer. The decision, though, was to seek bids for a designer, and to retain Lawless as an independent consultant.

Eisterholdllewellyn Exhibit Services landed the job of designer with a \$498,000 bid in December 1988. Its job was to take Lawless's ideas and translate them into graphics, audiovisual presentations and other ways of telling the story.

"I wrote the outline, and they wrote the book," said Lawless. At the time, Eisterholdllewellyn consisted of

Gerard Eisterhold and Anita Llewellyn, who worked together in Kansas City, Mo. They split up earlier this year, and Eisterhold, who is finishing the job as Eisterhold Associates, said he didn't want to talk about it.

Eisterhold said they began work on the civil rights museum by piling into a van and driving through the South to get a feel for civil rights sites: Little Rock High School, the Lorraine, the Ole Miss campus in Oxford, the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., and Montgomery and Birmingham, Ala.

Back in Kansas City, they researched and considered how the exhibits would relate to each other. They or their associates, including historians Horton and Crew, consulted libraries, archives and television stations for documents, audiotapes and videotapes and other material.

From the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, they obtained audiotapes of a series of conversations between Kennedy and Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett made when Ole Miss erupted in racial violence in 1962.

Eisterhold's firm found a number of artifacts for the exhibits, including the briefcase used by lawyer Arthur Shores to carry Dr. King's letter from the Birmingham jail in 1963, riot gear used by Memphis police during the 1968 sanitation workers' strike; leaflets advertising Freedom Schools in Mississippi in the summer of 1964; an FBI poster seeking information about the murder of three civil rights workers near Philadelphia, Miss., in 1964.

WITNESS: JULIAN BOND

Bond, 51, teaches politics of the civil rights movement at American University in Washington and is host of America's Black Forum on television. He was communications director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-65): "I think it's great there's going to be a museum anywhere and particularly good that it's going to be in the South and in Memphis. Not because Dr. King was killed in Memphis, but because he was killed leading a fight for sanitation workers. Clearly the unfinished business of the civil rights movement was to achieve economic justice."



WITNESS: BENJAMIN LAWLESS

Lawless, 65, is a museum design consultant who retired in 1981 after 28 years as director of exhibitions for the Smithsonian Institution. He describes himself as "merely a looker-on" to the movement who collected plywood huts from "Resurrection City" during the 1968 Poor People's March on Washington. In the Memphis museum, he said, "A lot of photographs are going to stop people in their tracks. I think older people will be triggered into remembering how it was, and younger people will say, 'Is this really possible?' The really thoughtful people will say, 'Is this over yet?' I think the thought I would like for people to take away is a feeling of constant vigilance about whether it could happen again. This museum ought to be a reminder that it did happen and could happen — that we have to be good citizens." Like any museum, it should be refined through the years, he said. "I hope they keep massaging this exhibit until they get it right."





Jameson-Vaccaro Construction Co., Inc.

A round of applause to all who had a hand in building the National Civil Rights Museum.

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