

From: **WDASHistory.org**



Photo: Bob Klein Archive

Out-take during photo-shoot for newspaper ad: Bob Klein [with cigar]  
WDAS-AM DJ's Larry Daley, 'Mr. Freeze,' Georgie Woods, Butterball,  
Johnny-O and Program Director Jimmy Bishop - December 1970

## **Bob Klein**

### **WDAS Radio**

**1950-1979**

Bob Klein began a career of extraordinary contributions to civil rights and broadcasting history when musician, entrepreneur and father-in-law, Max M. Leon, made him general manager of Philadelphia's WDAS Radio in 1951. Klein had been working there in the sales department, writing advertising and promotional copy. He was also attending Temple University where he would graduate with a master's degree in History.

In its October-1957 issue, *Broadcasting Magazine* reported that at 25 years old, Klein became one of the youngest general managers ever to lead a major metropolitan station. From that unusual moment on, Bob Klein's string of radio, music and civil rights innovations also rocked the history books.

He hired cutting edge disc jockeys who helped craft the Rhythm & Blues, signature sound of WDAS. At the same time, he created a first class news operation to cover the blossoming, yet still highly controversial and dangerous, civil rights movement. The comprehensive news operation he forged, created a new section in the nation's broadcasting lexicon. He was general manager and executive vice president until 1979, a tenure spanning some of the most crucial years of United States' social progress.

Klein's list of hires literally became a Who's Who in American Radio History:

'Jocko' Henderson, Jimmy Bishop, Louise Williams, Georgie Woods, Hy Lit, Hal Jackson, John 'Lord Fauntleroy' Bandy, Bernice Thompson, Portia Perry, Joe Rainey, Jim Klash, Joe Pyne, Ed Bradley,

Harvey Holiday, 'Sir Lancelot'-George Johnson, Jr., Joe 'Butterball' Tamburro, Dr. Perri Johnson, Wayne Joell, Ed Sciaky, Larry Daley, Steve Schorr, Mimi, Tony Brown and Michael Tierson lead a stellar array of nationally recognized talent.

Klein's groundbreaking, visionary creation of WDAS-FM's album-oriented, multi-racial, R&B format became a staple in the industry. The press release marking the format change to 'Music for the People' was drafted March 25, 1971. Though initially so-called radio experts predicted a flop, the revolutionary "Progressive Soul" format he and Harvey Holiday pioneered was a huge success, copied from city to city and is still heard today from the conventional radio dial to satellites and shopping mall music systems everywhere.

Klein assembled an award-winning news department that set a standard of excellence for Black and white radio news, amassing scores of the most prestigious awards in the country and helped invent civil rights news coverage.

WDAS was also the broadcast home to both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, *during their lifetimes*. Very few stations nationwide can claim that foresight and fairness. Klein not only put Dr. King on the air in Philadelphia, he devoted much of the station's financial and marketing resources to King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC] and was the initial producer of the radio program, "Dr. Martin Luther King Speaks" and helped it attain nationwide distribution. The months of compilation work took place at the WDAS studios, on behalf of SCLC.

WDAS staff suffered physical assaults and numerous threats of violence from both black and white extremists. Under Klein's guidance, nothing ever stopped the WDAS quest for justice and humanity.

The Pennsylvania Legislature commended him for creating jobs for African Americans in radio, when white stations would not. He was also applauded for elevating the status of Black recording artists when 'Jim Crow' dominated the entertainment scene in the United States of America.

The Congressional Record noted WDAS Charities and Klein's innovative Freedom Shows raised hundreds of thousands of pre-1980 dollars, breathing life into hundreds of social organizations and sent thirteen buses to the 1963 March on Washington.

In 1971, WDAS Radio was the first station to file and win a federal class action suit on behalf of all Black radio stations, proving the Arbitron [ARB] ratings system was racist and systematically undercounting Black listeners.

Bob Klein's commitment to social progress, civil rights and his close association with Dr. King, prompted this written testimonial from King confidante and co-drafter of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Ambassador Andrew Young:

**"...to our knowledge, there is no station in America that has worked harder, longer and with more dedication for Black people than WDAS in Philadelphia."**

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