

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable James Ford

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ford, James R., 1925-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford,
Dates:	April 21, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:47:12).
Abstract:	Mayor The Honorable James Ford (1925 - 2017) served on Tallahassee, Florida's city commission, becoming the first African American since the Reconstruction era to assume the role. He was also the city's first African American mayor. Ford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 21, 2002, in Tallahassee, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_053
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

James R. Ford, accomplished educator, politician, businessman, and community activist, was born on December 1, 1925 in Leon County, Florida. He attended Florida A&M University, where he earned his B.S. in 1950 and his M.Ed. in 1959.

Ford served in both the United States Navy and the United States Army. He worked for the Leon County Public School System from 1950-1987, as a teacher and its first black administrator, presiding over the first integrated school staff in Leon County.

In 1972, Ford became Tallahassee's first black mayor, the first black mayor of a state capitol city. He served subsequent terms as mayor in 1976 and 1982. In addition, he served fourteen consecutive years as a Tallahassee City Commissioner. In this office, he played a key role in establishing the Minority Business Department, the Frenchtown Area Development Authority and the Affirmative Action Office and worked to eliminate segregated practices in the city government and to secure employment for blacks.

Ford is also active in the business community. He built WAMN Radio Station, becoming Tallahassee's first black manager of a radio station. He owns and manages six businesses and acts as the President of CNJ Associates, Inc. He has served as the president of Sigma Phi Pi and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternities; the Tallahassee Urban League; the Tallahassee Chapter of 100 Black Men; and as Commander of the Tallahassee Sail and Power Squadron. He has sat on the boards of the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, Meals on Wheels, the March of Dimes Big Bend Chapter, the American Red Cross's Tallahassee Chapter and the Florida League of Cities; he currently sits on the boards of the Tallahassee Memorial Regional Medical Center, the Lively Vocational School and Peoples 1st Community Bank. He and his wife Clinita have a son and two daughters.

Ford passed away on October 11, 2017 at age 91.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable James Ford was conducted by Samuel Adams on April 21, 2002, in Tallahassee, Florida, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mayor The Honorable James Ford (1925 - 2017) served on Tallahassee, Florida's city commission, becoming the first African American since the Reconstruction era to assume the role. He was also the city's first African American mayor.

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:

Ford, James R., 1925-

Adams, Samuel (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ford, James R., 1925---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Tallahassee (Fla.)

Occupations:

Mayor

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 The Honorable James Ford, April 21, 2002. 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 The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_001, TRT: 0:30:53 ?

James Ford describes his family's history. His mother, Elvier Brown, was a domestic who lived with her parents, Hallie and William Reeves. Ford's father, William Benjamin Ford, worked as an assistant to a newspaper in Neptune, New

Jersey and was the son of a farmer named John Ford and the grandson of “Wild Bill” Ford, a sheriff in Leon County, Florida. Ford was born on December 1, 1925 in Leon County Florida. Ford’s mother and father never married, and he and his sister Kathryn Brown were raised by his mother and grandfather on his farm in Macon, Florida. Ford remembers his childhood responsibilities such as feeding horses, milking cows, gathering wood, and sweeping the lawn.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_002, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

James Ford describes his childhood and educational experiences in Leon County, Florida. Ford attended a one room schoolhouse called Macon Elementary School from first to sixth grade, where he was taught by his Aunt Lou and where he enjoyed recess and May Day celebrations. In 1935, Ford listened to a radio that belonged to a traveling insurance man and decided to pursue a career in electronics. From sixth grade through senior year, Ford attended Lincoln High School in Tallahassee, Florida, where he was inspired by his mathematics teacher Henrietta Williams, his vocational agriculture teacher, George Henry Brown, and the school principal Dr. Gilbert Porter. Ford remembers social life centering on the two churches in town, Primitive Baptist and Missionary Baptist, and on community events like cane grindings, basket feasts, and peanut harvests.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

James Ford describes his experience in college and in the military. While a student at Lincoln High School, Ford took vocational classes at Florida A&M University to prepare for a career in the national defense trades. In 1941, before Ford graduated from high school, the United States entered into World War II and Ford went to Chester, Pennsylvania to apply for a job at Sun Shipbuilding. After a few months there, Ford was drafted into the United States Navy and served as a First Class Steward on the U.S.S. Gage in the Pacific during World War II. As the captain’s steward, Ford enjoyed a level of freedom that was not usually granted to black men in the Navy. After leaving the Navy, Ford enrolled at Florida A&M University to study electricity and ROTC. In 1950, Ford graduated from Florida A&M University with a B.S. degree in electrics and was commissioned as second Lieutenant in the United States Army. In 1951, Ford married Clinita Arnsby and began his teaching career at Lincoln High School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_004, TRT: 0:29:17 ?

James Ford describes his career as a principal in Leon County, Florida and his decision to run for City Commissioner in 1971. After leaving Lincoln High School, Ford became principal at the rural Concord School in the Miccosukee community in northeast Leon County, Florida. Here he was responsible for the first integrated school staff in Leon County when he hired two white teachers. He then became assistant principal for the white Leon High School, where he gained support from the student body president, Doug Mannheimer. In 1971, Ford decided to run for one of two City Commissioner positions with the help of Herman Landers and Willie Jenkins.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_005, TRT: 0:28:37 ?

James Ford describes his election as a City Commissioner in 1971 and his experiences as Mayor of Tallahassee, the first black mayor of a state’s capital city. Ford was first elected Mayor in 1972 and was re-elected in 1976 and 1982. During this time, Ford remembers stopping a Ku Klux Klan march by granting

permission for them to march and then showing up to confront the marchers at eight in the morning. He also describes how he improved the city's credit rating to Triple A by taking trips to New York City to learn more about the bond market. Ford served as a city commissioner for fourteen consecutive years while also working as a teacher and principal for Leon Public Schools. He describes the importance of black educators being good role models for students and providing a good foundation for their education.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Ford, Section A2002_053_001_006, TRT: 0:19:49 ?

James Ford reflects upon the role of black elected officials and shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Ford believes that black elected officials should improve the welfare of all ethnic groups in their constituency and encompass all of the facets of their community rather than focus on the interest of the African American community specifically. He hopes that the African American community will become politically and financially independent. He hopes that his legacy will be that he did the best with what he was given. He ends the interview by narrating his photographs.