

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jordan, Vernon E., 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.,
Dates:	January 24, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:27:30).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive and civil rights lawyer Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. (1935 - 2021) held various positions as a civil rights advocate, serving as the Georgia field secretary for the NAACP; the director of the Voter Education Project for the Southern Regional Council; the head of the United Negro College Fund; and as a delegate to President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House Conference on Civil Rights. During the Clinton administration, Jordan became one of the most influential power brokers in Washington, D.C. Jordan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 24, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_019
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Lawyer and Washington power broker Vernon Jordan was born on August 15, 1935, in Atlanta. Graduating with honors from David T. Howard High School in 1953, he went on to attend DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, where he was the only African American student in his class. At DePauw, Jordan participated in the student senate, won statewide honors in speaking competitions, played basketball and graduated in 1957. He then entered Howard University School of Law, receiving his J.D. in 1960.

Jordan returned to Atlanta starting his legal career working with the civil rights movement. In 1961, he helped organize the integration of the University of Georgia and personally escorted student Charlayne Hunter through a hostile white crowd. Over the next ten years, Jordan held various positions as a civil rights advocate. He served as the Georgia field secretary for the NAACP; director of the Voter Education Project for the Southern Regional Council; head of the United Negro College Fund; and as a delegate to President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House Conference on Civil Rights.

In 1971, Jordan was appointed president and CEO of the National Urban League, where he spearheaded the organization's growth. On May 29, 1980, a white supremacist attempted to kill Jordan. After a successful recuperation, in 1981 Jordan resigned from the National Urban League to take a position as legal council with the Washington, D.C. office of the law firm of Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer and Feld. His active practice includes corporate, legislative and international clients. Jordan's close friend is former President Bill Clinton and during Clinton's presidency, Jordan became one of Washington's most influential power brokers. Currently he is a partner in the investment firm of Lazard Frere & Company in New York.

Jordan has received numerous awards and honors for his work, including the Alexis de Tocqueville Award from the United Way of America in 1977 for his dedication to volunteerism. In 2001, Jordan published his autobiography, *Vernon Can Read!* to widespread praise. He has also authored a weekly newspaper column syndicated to more than 300 newspapers and serves as a frequent television guest and commentator. Jordan is an active on various corporate boards and has had various presidential appointments.

Jordan and his wife, Ann, reside in Washington, D.C. and have four children.

Jordan was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 24, 2003.

Jordan passed away on March 1, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 24, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive and civil rights lawyer Vernon E. Jordan, Jr. (1935 - 2021) held various positions as a civil rights advocate, serving as the Georgia field secretary for the NAACP; the director of the Voter Education Project for the Southern Regional Council; the head of the United Negro College Fund; and as a delegate to President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House Conference on Civil Rights. During the Clinton administration, Jordan became one of the most influential power brokers in Washington, D.C.

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:

Jordan, Vernon E., 1935-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Jordan, Vernon E., 1935---Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American political consultants--Interviews

African American families

African Americans--Genealogy

African American mothers

African Americans--Social life and customs

African Americans--Social conditions

African Americans--Segregation--Georgia

Elementary school teachers

Elementary schools--United States

YMCA

DePauw University

Child rearing--United States

African American fathers

Discrimination in education

Discrimination in employment

Howard University. School of Law

Howard University

Interpersonal relations

African American children

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Urban League.

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

Civic Leader

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|LawMakers

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 Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., January 24, 2003. 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 Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Section A2003_019_001_001, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Vernon E. Jordan describes his father's and mother's backgrounds and personalities. He focuses especially on his mother, who worked as a cook in the homes of white people before starting her own catering business. Jordan describes his mother's drive for success, and her creativity, qualities that he believes helped her have great success in business. Jordan then describes growing up in an Atlanta housing project, University Homes, a close-knit community with many successful black professionals in residence. He recalls wanting to emulate these professionals and other successful blacks around town, including the presidents of Atlanta's many black colleges. Jordan then describes his experience taking piano lessons as a child, confessing that stopping these lessons is one of his biggest regrets. Jordan describes his two brothers, both of whom were very close to him while growing up.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American political consultants--Interviews.

African American families.

African Americans--Genealogy.

African American mothers.

African Americans--Social life and customs.

African Americans--Social conditions.

African Americans--Segregation--Georgia.

Elementary school teachers.

Elementary schools--United States.

Young Men's Christian Associations of North America.

DePauw University.

Child rearing--United States.

African American fathers.

Discrimination in education.

Discrimination in employment.

Howard University. School of Law.

Howard University.

Interpersonal relations.

African American children.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Section A2003_019_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Vernon E. Jordan recalls his mother encouraging all of her children equally, and credits her encouragement with his pride in his family. He describes his family's

participation in church, recalling his experience in Sunday school. Jordan then describes his elementary school experience, paying tribute to many of his teachers, whom he said succeeded despite a lack of proper funding. He recalls some fond memories from his childhood and describes his childhood personality. Jordan then details his experiences in the YMCA, describing it as a community-wide institution in Atlanta that made a deep impression on his life and the lives of many others. Jordan describes his college aspirations as a teenager, recalling that his desire to attend college in the North conflicted with expectations, but after encouragement from a close friend, he made the decision to attend DePauw University in Indiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Section A2003_019_001_003, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Vernon E. Jordan describes his parents' different approaches to child raising, explaining that his mother took the lead and raised his expectations; his father offered support and encouragement as well, just not to the degree of his mother. Jordan then considers which of his parents' character traits can be found in him. He attributes his organizational skills to his father, and his creativity to his mother. Jordan details his time at DePauw University in Indiana, a unique experience because he was the only African American member of his graduating class. Though he faced some prejudice and discrimination, Jordan says he has fond memories of DePauw and would choose to go there again. Jordan recalls working for a racist banker during summer breaks in college, and says that his employer's prejudices motivated him to succeed as a student and to attend law school. Jordan then describes his time at Howard University Law School, recalling his delight at being able to date African American co-eds and the wealth of knowledge he gained from Howard's legendary faculty.