

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles R. Jordan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jordan, Charles R., 1937-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles R. Jordan,
Dates:	September 20, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:31).
Abstract:	City parks administrator and foundation chief executive Charles R. Jordan (1937 - 2014) was the first African American elected to an office in Portland, Oregon as a member of the city council. He also served as City Fire, Police and Parks Commissioner. Jordan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 20, 2004, in Arlington, Virginia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_167
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Charles Ray Jordan was born on September 1, 1937 in Longview, Texas. His mother raised Jordan along with his sister and brother working as a domestic in rural Texas. He never knew his father. At the age of thirteen his mother moved the family to Palm Springs, California where they lived on an Indian Reservation.

Jordan earned his high school diploma from Palm Springs High School in 1956. As a high school basketball star he was offered numerous athletic scholarships. From 1956 until 1961 he attended Gonzaga University in Washington where he earned his Bachelor of Science degrees in Education, Sociology and Philosophy. He did graduate work in Education at Loma Linda University and in Public Administration at the University of Southern California.

Upon graduation from Gonzaga, Jordan was unable to obtain a job in his field of study. He was forced to work as a gardener for California actors Lawrence Harvey and Jack Lambert. From 1961 until 1970 Jordan worked for the City of Palm Springs. After being hired as the first African American Recreation Leader for the city, he went on to become Assistant Director of Recreation and Assistant to the City Manager. From 1962 until 1964 he took a leave of absence to fulfill a two-year tour of duty in the United States Army. In 1970 Jordan moved to Portland, Oregon to work on the federal Model Cities Program. Jordan then went on to become Portland's first elected African American. He served on the city council from 1974 until 1984, where he served as City Fire, Police and Parks Commissioner. From 1984 until 1989 Jordan was appointed Parks Director of Austin, Texas. In 1989 he returned to Portland to oversee its Parks system, a post he held until 2003. Jordan stepped down to take the helm at the Conservation Fund, a non-profit environmental organization.

In 1985 Jordan was appointed to the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors by former President, Ronald Reagan. During the Clinton administration, Jordan was appointed to the American Heritage Rivers Advisory Committee. He was known worldwide for his commitment and leadership in involving African Americans in the conservation movement.

Jordan passed away on April 4, 2014, at the age of 77.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles R. Jordan was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on September 20, 2004, in Arlington, Virginia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. City parks administrator and foundation chief executive Charles R. Jordan (1937 - 2014) was the first African American elected to an office in Portland, Oregon as a member of the city council. He also served as City Fire, Police and Parks Commissioner.

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, Charles R., 1937-2014

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Jordan, Charles R., 1937-2014--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Portland Parks and Recreation

Conservation Fund (Arlington, Va.)

Occupations:

City Parks Administrator

City Social Service Worker

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers|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 Charles R. Jordan, September 20, 2004. 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 Charles R. Jordan, Section A2004_167_001_001, TRT: 0:29:27
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Charles R. Jordan was born on September 1, 1937 in Longview, Texas. His father, Isaac Jordan, left the family when he was a baby. Jordan's mother, Willie Mae Glaspie, was born in 1912 in rural Texas, and worked as a maid to support her three children. Jordan had many father figures growing up, including his uncle John Henry Glaspie, who taught him to fish and gather plants. As a young child, Jordan enjoyed the wilderness and would go into the woods to bring back clay dirt for his mother to eat. Jordan remembers Christmas Eve traditions and Juneteenth barbecues during his childhood. He began elementary school in Longview; his family moved to Kilgore, Texas, an oil town, when he was in second grade. In Kilgore, Jordan first faced discrimination when a gas station owner barred him from using a water fountain. When he was in seventh grade, his family moved to Palm Springs, California, where they lived on an Indian reservation which was the only place people of color could live. Jordan narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles R. Jordan, Section A2004_167_001_002, TRT: 0:29:25
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Charles R. Jordan lived on a Native American reservation in Palm Springs, California as a teenager. He began playing basketball at the Boys Club on the reservation, developed a strong work ethic helping his mother and aunt who worked as domestics and developed his public speaking skills in the Baptist church. He attended Nellie N. Coffman Middle School and graduated from Palm Springs High School in 1956. He accepted a basketball scholarship to Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, becoming the first member of his family to attend college. On the advice of a priest at Gonzaga, Jordan changed his major from education to sociology and planned to pursue a career in local government. Due to discriminatory hiring practices, he had difficulty finding a job and had to work as a gardener for Hollywood actors. In 1961, he was hired by the City of Palm Springs as its first black recreation leader. He eventually became an assistant to the city manager. He concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles R. Jordan, Section A2004_167_001_003, TRT: 0:29:24
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Charles R. Jordan began his career in 1961, as a recreation leader for the City of Palm Springs, California. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1962 and returned to his job with the city in 1964. He was eventually promoted to assistant to the city manager. Jordan was interviewed for a position as director of the Model Cities program in Portland, Oregon. Despite opposition from a black militant group, who wanted a local hired for the position, he was hired in 1970 and managed the program for two years. In 1974, Jordan became the first black Portland city councilman; he was reelected three times and served as commissioner over both parks and police. In 1984, Jordan accepted a job as director of parks in Austin, Texas. In that role, he spearheaded the Town Lake project with Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson. In 1989, Jordan became the Portland parks director. In this role, he was in charge of developing Pioneer Courthouse Square. He served in that role until 2003. Jordan narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles R. Jordan, Section A2004_167_001_004, TRT: 0:31:15
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Charles R. Jordan served on the President's Commission on American Outdoors in 1984. Through this commission, he met Pat Noonan, who hired him as a board member for The Conservation Fund (TCF). Jordan was named chairman

of the board for TCF in 2003. He describes the operations of The Conservation Fund, which promotes environmental goals by tying them to economic development opportunities. Jordan mentions the national lead paint crisis and the development of a hiking trail in Lithonia, Georgia as two matters with both environmental and economic ramifications for the African American community. Jordan describes his hopes for the African American community and the African American community's relationship to the conversation movement. He considers the importance of history, the reasons for his success and plans for his future. He also shares advice for people interested in the environmental field. Jordan describes how he would like to be remembered and reflects upon his legacy. He narrates his photographs.