

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

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Joseph, James A. (James Alfred), 1935-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 24, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:01).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Foreign ambassador The Honorable James Joseph (1935 - ) was appointed Under Secretary of the Department of the Interior under President Jimmy Carter, and became President and CEO of the Council on Foundations. In 1996, President Bill Clinton appointed Joseph as Ambassador to South Africa. Joseph was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 24, 2007, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_186
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former United States Ambassador to South Africa James Alfred Joseph was born on March 12, 1935 in Plaisance, Louisiana to Julia and Adam Joseph, farmers. Joseph attended the segregated St. Landry Parish Training School where he excelled in English and original oratory. He won the state oratory competition and placed second in the national competition. Joseph was an avid athlete who achieved success in track and basketball, and during high school, Joseph served as student government association president. In 1952, upon graduation from high school, Joseph entered Southern University where he served as class president, president of the Baptist Club and as the debate team champion. He graduated with his B.A. degree in political science and social studies. In 1959, Joseph received his master's degree in Divinity from Yale University. At Yale, Joseph became active in civil rights protests and marches while serving in the ROTC in a non-combatant unit.

In 1963, Joseph began his academic career at Stillman College while working as a civil rights organizer. As an ordained minister, Joseph also taught at Yale Divinity School and the Claremont Colleges, where he served as University Chaplain. In 1971, Joseph left academia and was hired as Vice President of Cummins Engine Company. He also served as president of the Cummins Engine Foundation. After five years in corporate philanthropy, Joseph moved to government in 1977 when he was appointed Under Secretary for the Department of the Interior under President Jimmy Carter. In 1982, Joseph returned to philanthropy as the president and chief executive officer of the Council on Foundations, an international organization comprised of more than 2,000 foundations, where he served until 1995. During this time, President Ronald Reagan appointed Joseph to the Advisory Committee to the Agency for International Development, and in 1985, he was named a Distinguished Visitor at Nuffield College at Oxford University.

In 1996, Joseph joined the ambassadorial ranks when was named United States Ambassador to South Africa under President Bill Clinton where he would serve until 2000. As such, he was the first ambassador to present credentials

to President Nelson Mandela. Joseph was awarded the Order of Good Hope by South African President Thabo Mbeki. Joseph continues to speak publicly about a variety of civic, religious and academic issues and is the author of *The Charitable Impulse* and *Remaking America*. After Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans and Joseph's home-state of Louisiana, Governor Kathleen Blanco named Joseph the Chairman of the newly formed Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation. Joseph is also the founder of the United States-Southern Africa Center for Leadership and Public Values at Duke University and the University of Cape Town.

Joseph was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 24, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable James Joseph was conducted by Cheryl Butler on June 24, 2007, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Foreign ambassador The Honorable James Joseph (1935 - ) was appointed Under Secretary of the Department of the Interior under President Jimmy Carter, and became President and CEO of the Council on Foundations. In 1996, President Bill Clinton appointed Joseph as Ambassador to South Africa.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Joseph, James A. (James Alfred), 1935-

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Joseph, James A. (James Alfred), 1935---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Federal Government Appointee

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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## 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 Joseph, June 24, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph, Section A2007\_186\_001\_001,  
TRT: 0:28:33 ?

The Honorable James Joseph was born on March 12, 1935 in Plaisance, Louisiana to Julia Jones Joseph and Adam Joseph, who were both also from Plaisance. His maternal grandmother, Minerva Jones, was Native American. She and his grandfather, Leonce Jones, had little formal education, but were knowledgeable about local politics. Like her parents, Joseph's mother left school to work as a farmer. Joseph's paternal grandparents, Celestine Joseph and Albert Joseph, were also farmers. His father completed high school in Opelousas, Louisiana, and went on to attend New Orleans' Leland College. Joseph's family initially lived on his paternal grandparents' land, and later moved to their own home in Plaisance. Eventually, they moved to Opelousas, where Joseph's father became a minister. Joseph was close to his older brother, John W. Joseph, with whom he attended the St. Landry Parish Training School in Opelousas. Concerned about his sons' education, Joseph's father did not allow them to speak the local Creole language.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph, Section A2007\_186\_001\_002,  
TRT: 0:28:44 ?

The Honorable James Joseph grew up near the town of Opelousas, Louisiana, where numerous lynchings were committed at the courthouse, which served as the state headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan. Outside of town, Joseph often gave speeches at the Starlight Baptist Church, where his father was the pastor. At the all-black St. Landry Parish Training School, Joseph's math teacher, Samuel Douglas, also instructed him in elocution and philosophy. Joseph participated in speech competitions, and was elected student body president and class president. During the summers, he worked at Weldon's Cafeteria in Houston, Texas, where he was once reported for defending himself from racist white customers. Upon graduation, Joseph matriculated at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he was mentored by Dean Martin Harvey and President Joseph Samuel Clark. He took courses in social studies under professors Lionel H. Newsom and Rodney Gonzales Higgins, who also led him in Bayou Boys State.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph, Section A2007\_186\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:28:28 ?

The Honorable James Joseph joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where his brothers included civil rights activist Grady Poulard. He also met educator Mary McLeod Bethune, and mediated between President Joseph Samuel Clark and the students during a protest. With the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, Joseph attended the newly integrated summer training camps, where the African American corpsmen faced racial discrimination. Upon graduating, Joseph taught high school in Louisiana, and then received his U.S. military commission as an administrator in the Medical Service Corps. He trained at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, and was then assigned to Fort Devens in Massachusetts. Joseph was discharged in 1958, and taught briefly in Louisiana before matriculating at the Yale Divinity School in 1959. While there, he participated in civil rights protests, excelled academically and obtained an internship at the majority-white Claremont College through the Danforth Foundation.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph, Section A2007\_186\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:28:58 ?

The Honorable James Joseph graduated from the Yale Divinity School, and was hired at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. There, he organized the

Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee with pastors T.Y. Rogers and Will L. Herzfeld. He also met activists Andrew Young, James Bevel and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. When white and colored signs were installed at the newly built courthouse, they marched there from First African Baptist Church, and were attacked by state troopers with billy clubs, cattle prods and baseball bats. Joseph left in 1963, after receiving threats against his infant son, Jeffrey Joseph. He became a chaplain at California's Claremont College, where he led protests of the Vietnam War on campus and throughout the region. His oratory was influenced by William Sloane Coffin, the chaplain of Yale University; and was often accompanied by folk singer Clabe Hangan. In 1964, Joseph led a group of mostly white students to register black voters in Edwards, Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable James Joseph, Section A2007\_186\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:29:18 ?

The Honorable James Joseph served from 1963 as the chaplain of the majority-white Claremont College in Claremont, California. There, he befriended Pan-Africanist Maulana Karenga, invited black poets to the college church services and established Project Open Future. In 1967, Joseph moved to Columbus, Indiana as the associate director of the Cummins Engine Foundation, Kaiser Family Foundation and a banking foundation. While there, he helped found the United Black Fund, and the Association of Black Foundation Executives with Harriet Michelle Michel. Joseph also worked with Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School to create a fellowship for black religious scholars. In 1973, Joseph travelled to South Africa, where he became an anti-apartheid activist. He then returned to the chaplaincy of Claremont College, where he was reprimanded for leading a protest at which students burned a picture of Ronald Reagan, who was then a gubernatorial candidate. Joseph was later appointed to the U.S. Department of the Interior.