

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lucky Cordell

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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>	Cordell, Lucky, 1928-2015
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 16, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:22:43).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Radio personality Lucky Cordell (1928 - 2015 ) , affectionately known as “The Baron of Bounce,” Cordell was a disc jockey at WVON in Chicago becoming the program and music director in 1965 and the general manager in the late 1970s. Under his leadership, the station increased its ratings and almost doubled the income received from advertising. Cordell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 16, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_017
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Disc jockey Moses “Lucky” Cordell, affectionately known as “The Baron of Bounce,” was born in Grenada, Mississippi, on July 28, 1928, to Grace and Moses Cordell. At age three, his mother died unexpectedly and his family moved to Chicago. Cordell attended Chicago Public Schools and graduated from Dunbar Technical High School in 1946. Shortly after graduation, Cordell joined the U.S. Army, serving in the Special Services Branch. While in the military, Cordell

developed his theatrical ability. He received an honorable discharge in 1948. He was hired at WGES as a disk jockey in 1952 to work under Al Benson.

While working at WGRY in Gary, Indiana, Cordell hosted the popular show *House of Hits*. The show was well known for its audience participation and became a community favorite among African Americans in Gary. In 1956, local newspapers held an election for the “Honorary Mayor of the Negro Community” and Cordell won unanimously (beating four other radio personalities, religious leaders and political leaders). He held this honor for four years, until he decided not to run in 1960.

Cordell worked at several other radio stations in the Chicago area before taking a position as a disc jockey at WVON in Chicago. WVON, owned and operated by Chess Records, would become one of the most influential radio stations in United States history. Cordell became WVON’s program and music director in 1965, and in 1968 he was promoted to assistant general manager. After a change in station ownership in late 1970, Cordell became general manager. Under his leadership, the station increased its ratings and almost doubled the income received from advertising.

In the late 1960s, Cordell joined the Chicago Urban League. After retiring from the radio business, Cordell remained an active member of Chicago’s African American community.

Cordell passed away on September 6, 2015.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lucky Cordell was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 16, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio personality Lucky Cordell (1928 - 2015) , affectionately known as “The Baron of Bounce,” Cordell was a disc jockey at WVON in Chicago becoming the program and music director in 1965 and the general manager in the late 1970s. Under his leadership, the station increased its ratings and almost doubled the income received from advertising.

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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:**

Cordell, Lucky, 1928-2015

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Cordell, Lucky, 1928-2015--Interviews

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African American disc jockeys--Illinois--Chicago--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:**

Radio Personality

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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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 Lucky Cordell, January 16, 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 2/5/2020 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 Lucky Cordell, Section  
A2001\_017\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:02 2001/01/16

Radio personality Lucky Cordell details his family background and his childhood growing up on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. Cordell explains why tragedies in his family prompted his family to move to Chicago, and talks about his close relationship with his father, since his mother died when he was only three years old. Cordell recalls many features of his old neighborhood, telling a story of how he was mugged and explaining how his neighborhood friends gave him his nickname. Cordell then discusses his education, explaining why he chose to attend a vocational high school.

African American families.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Chicago.

African American neighborhoods--Illinois--Chicago--  
South Side.

African American fathers.

Education, Secondary--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section  
A2001\_017\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:31 2001/01/16

Radio personality Lucky Cordell details his time in the U.S. military, describing his eighteen months spent on a Navy base in the Aleutian Islands. Cordell explains his decision to attend radio school upon his return, and tells of his first entry into the broadcasting business. Cordell first worked at WGES in Chicago, under the tutelage of legendary disc jockey Al Benson. Cordell details his

business relationship with Benson, which was at times fractious. Cordell talks about how he became an independent voice at WGES, which eventually led to getting his own show at WGRY in Gary, Indiana.

United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.

Benson, Al, 1908-1978.

Radio--Study and teaching--United States.

WGES (Radio station : Chicago, Ill.).

Radio stations--Indiana--Gary.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section

A2001\_017\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:21 2001/01/16

Radio personality Lucky Cordell details his rocky business relationship with disc jockey Al Benson, and explains how Benson was the most popular personality in radio during the 1950s. Cordell talks about how he moved his up-tempo style to Gary, Indiana's WGRY in the late 1950s, where he soon became the most popular DJ in town. He explains his marketing strategies and how he used a variety of programs to connect with a broad audience in Gary. Cordell also talks about his participation in the famous black theater troupe, the Skyloft Players.

Benson, Al, 1908-1978.

Radio stations--Indiana--Gary.

Radio--Marketing.

Black theater--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section

A2001\_017\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:03 2001/01/16

Radio personality Lucky Cordell continues to discuss the reasons behind his success at WGRY in Gary, Indiana, and then details his career transition to WVON, where he became general manager of the most popular and dynamic radio station in Chicago. Cordell talks about many of the disc jockeys at WVON, and discusses his relationship with station owner Leonard Chess. When Chess sold the station to a large corporation, Cordell explains how he was promoted to an executive position but was still able to maintain a good rapport with the deejays. He also evaluates the positive atmosphere at WVON and measures its impact on Chicago's black community.

Chess, Leonard, 1917-1969

Disc jockeys.

Radio in community development--Illinois--Chicago.

Radio stations--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section  
A2001\_017\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:35 2001/01/16

Radio personality Lucky Cordell details the change of ownership at WVON, explaining how new ownership affected the management structure. Cordell also reflects back on his time at WVON, sharing many stories about the colorful characters that were disc jockeys and managers at the station during the 1960s and 1970s. Cordell then talks about his devotion to public service, describing how he helped to found Operation PUSH with Jesse Jackson and how he developed a CHA housing projects radio station with Mayor Harold Washington. Finally, Cordell comments on the state of black radio today.

Disc jockeys--Illinois--Chicago.

Operation PUSH (U.S.).

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-

Washington, Harold, 1922-1987.

Radio in community development--Illinois--Chicago.

Radio stations--Illinois--Chicago.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section  
A2001\_017\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:33 2002/01/16

Lucky Cordell narrates a collection of photographs.

Photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Lucky Cordell, Section  
A2001\_017\_001\_007, TRT: 0:23:38 2002/01/16

Lucky Cordell narrates a collection of photographs.

Photographs.