

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles R. Jordan

PERSON

Jordan, Charles R., 1937-2014

**Alternative Names:** Charles R. Jordan;

**Life Dates:** September 1, 1937-April 4, 2014

**Place of Birth:** Longview, Texas, USA

**Residence:** Portland, OR

**Occupations:** City Parks Administrator; Foundation  
Chief Executive

## Biographical Note

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.

## **Related Entries**

**Palm Springs High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Gonzaga University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**City of Palm Springs** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 199607 to 199907]

**Assistant to the City Manager**

**City of Palm Springs** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1957 to 2001]

**Assistant Director of Recreation**

**United States Army** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1980 to 2011]

**Federal Model Cities Program** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1970 to ?]

**Portland City Council** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2006 to ?]

**Councilman**

**City of Austin, Texas** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1984 to 1989]

**Parks Director**

**Portland Parks and Recreation** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1989 to 2003]

**Commissioner**

**Conservation Fund** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 2003 to ?]

**Director**

**American Heritage Rivers Advisory Committee**

[MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**President's Commission on Americans Outdoors**

[MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**The Conservation Fund** [MEMBEROF]

[from 1986 to ?]

**Chair**