

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Mondesire, Jerome Whyatt, 1949-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire,
Dates:	July 11, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:47:20).
Abstract:	Association branch executive and newspaper publishing chief executive The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire (1949 - 2015) published the Philadelphia Sun newspaper and acted as president of Philadelphia's chapter of the NAACP. Mondesire passed away on October 4, 2015. Mondesire was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 11, 2005, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_158
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper publisher and former congressional staff member Jerome Whyatt “Jerry” Mondesire was born October 10, 1949, in Harlem, New York. Mondesire’s working class parents, Jerome Alexis Mondesire, a Dominican Garveyite, and Winnifred Taylor Mondesire of South Carolina, emphasized education. Mondesire attended P.S. 88 and Junior High School 172; he graduated from Martin Van Buren High School in Queens in 1968, where he was a member of the NAACP

High School Youth Council. Mondesire attended City Colleges of New York, where he studied journalism and was a student activist and volunteer with SNCC in 1969.

Mondesire covered the Black October killings of Maryland State Senator James Turk Scott and “Pee Wee” Matthews for the Baltimore Sun in 1973. At the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1974, Mondesire covered Mayor Frank Rizzo’s strip-searching of the Black Panthers. At the *Inquirer*, Mondesire became assistant city desk editor, turning to politics full-time in 1977. Mondesire was later chosen to work as chief of staff for William H. Gray’s successful congressional campaign. As Congressman Gray’s top aide, Mondesire influenced and shaped policy; he was instrumental in the 1985 national Stop The Springboks! Campaign, and helped to write the South African sanctions legislation for Congress. In 1991, Mondesire started his own weekly newspaper, *The Philadelphia Sunday Sun*. In 1992, after Congressman Gray retired, Mondesire acquired the *Philadelphia Sun* newspaper including the online edition. Mondesire also hosted the *FreedomQuest*, a local public and political affairs talk show on Philadelphia cable television. Mondesire was elected president of Philadelphia’s NAACP chapter where he increased membership to over 5,000. Under Mondesire the NAACP overturned the ex-felon disenfranchisement law in 1999. Mondesire remained active in welfare to work training, health care, youth violence and police brutality.

Mondesire passed away on October 4, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 11, 2005, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Association branch executive and newspaper publishing chief executive The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire (1949 - 2015) published the Philadelphia Sun newspaper and acted as president of Philadelphia's chapter of the NAACP. Mondesire passed away on October 4, 2015.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

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:

Mondesire, Jerome Whyatt, 1949-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Mondesire, Jerome Whyatt, 1949-2015--Interviews

African Americans in the newspaper industry--Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

United States. Congress--Employees--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Association Branch Executive

Newspaper Publishing Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers||MediaMakers

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 Jerome W. Mondesire, July 11, 2005. 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).

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 The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_001, TRT: 0:29:00 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire was born on October 14, 1949 to Winnifred Taylor and Jerome A. Mondesire in Harlem, New York. Mondesire's paternal grandfather was born to a French priest and his African housekeeper, and was given his father's surname. Mondesire's paternal grandfather was also well-educated and owned a plantation and an ice factory on Saint Kitts while his wife worked as baker. Mondesire's father was born in 1893 in Dominica and grew up in Saint Kitts. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1912. In New York City, he worked as an elevator operator, and later, as a sleeping car porter. Mondesire's mother was born in Charleston, South Carolina, where she worked as a domestic. She then moved with her mother and sisters to Harlem, and worked in the garment industry. In the 1940s, she met Mondesire's father at a West Indian dance. As a single mother, she ensured that Mondesire received a good education. Mondesire describes his early impressions of Harlem, including the African National Memorial Bookstore. African Americans in the newspaper industry--Interviews.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

United States. Congress--Employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W.

Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire's mother lived in Harlem while he lived with other New York City families so he could attend better schools. At P.S. 88 in the Bronx, his fifth grade teacher used music in her lessons and took the class on field trips to cultural festivals. Growing up, Mondesire was shy and bookish. In Queens, he attended J.H.S. 172, followed by Martin Van Buren High School, where he studied Russian and considered an engineering career. After his mother's death, he was raised by his father. Despite being a former a Garveyite, his father disapproved of Mondesire's civil rights activism when it took a more radical bent. Mondesire attended the City College of New York where he joined SNCC and traveled to Lowndes County, Alabama to help elect the first black sheriff. He describes the Apollo Theater and New York City's music scene where, in Central Park, he saw Bobbi Humphrey jam on stage with Herbie Mann. He also remembers his family's first TV and being invited to a Weather Underground meeting.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W.

Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire joined the NAACP Youth Council when he was in high school. While attending the City of College of New York, he developed his interest in journalism and participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Upon graduating in 1971, he received a fellowship from the Washington Journalism Center to intern for The New York Times in Washington, D.C., and this internship led to his hiring at The Baltimore Sun. Assigned to write obituaries for Baltimore's black residents, Mondesire contacted a black funeral director and learned the paper historically neglected to cover deaths of the city's African American population. Mondesire also describes his coverage of the Black October organization, which sought to eradicate Baltimore's drug culture, and the murder of James "Turk"

Scott, a Maryland politician and drug dealer. He remembers his experiences traveling to the South, as a child and with SNCC. He also describes the impact of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in Harlem.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_004, TRT: 0:28:10 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire worked as a journalist for The Baltimore Sun where he covered Black October's activities targeting Baltimore drug dealers in the early 1970s. He reflects upon Black October's violent tactics, as well as Baltimore's drug culture. In 1973, he began working for The Philadelphia Inquirer where he covered Philadelphia City Hall and Mayor Frank Rizzo. However, when his performance was negatively evaluated during a management training program, he left the paper to work as chief of staff for HistoryMaker William H. Gray, III. In that position, Mondesire contributed to passing legislation to fund social programs. He also advocated for the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and helped create Operation Understanding. When Gray left to join the UNCF, Mondesire founded a weekly African American newspaper, The Philadelphia Sunday Sun. He describes his and Gray's contributions to the anti-apartheid movement, including calling for economic sanctions against South Africa.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_005, TRT: 0:29:40 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire was chief of staff for HistoryMaker William H. Gray, III for twelve years, during which Philadelphia's political landscape changed dramatically. In 1995, Mondesire founded the Philadelphia Sunday Sun, an African American newspaper, which acquired its own building. At this time, he began attending Philadelphia's NAACP chapter meetings. With its membership dwindling, Mondesire wanted to rejuvenate its status; and, in 1997, he ran for president of the chapter. After discovering and revealing a damaging letter written by his opponent to Roy Wilkins, Mondesire's slate went on to win the election. During his presidency, the chapter expanded its membership and fostered the development of

several programs, such as ACT-SO, welfare-to-work training and anti-violence campaigns. Mondesire talks about long-term solutions to violence and HistoryMaker Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr.'s involvement in bombing the activist group MOVE. He also describes a visit to Pennsylvania's Graterford Prison.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jerome W.

Mondesire, Section A2005_158_001_006, TRT: 0:21:40 2005/07/11

The Honorable Jerome W. Mondesire describes his visit to Pennsylvania's Graterford Prison where he encountered a grandfather, father and son who were all serving life sentences. In this context, he considers the issue of violence for African American youth. He also describes the challenges he encountered as the president of the Philadelphia NAACP chapter and remembers prominent NAACP leaders, such as Vernon Dahmer and Daisy Bates. In talking about his relationship with mayor of Philadelphia John F. Street, Mondesire notes how, despite their previous conflicts, they both have collaborated to support programs like ACT-SO. Mondesire describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon his life and legacy. He describes his hope that younger generations consider running for political office, his children and how he would like to be remembered.