

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert H. Jordan, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jordan, Robert H., Jr., 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr.,
Dates:	February 18, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:03:20).
Abstract:	Television news anchor Robert H. Jordan, Jr. (1943 -) was an anchor and reporter for WGN-TV News in Chicago, Illinois. He founded his own production company and has written two screenplays. Jordan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 18, 2008, in Lincolnwood, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_018
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

WGN-TV News anchorman Robert Jordan was born Robert Howard Jordan, Jr. on August 31, 1943 in Atlanta, Georgia to Millicent Dobbs Jordan, a college professor, and Robert H. Jordan, Sr., a dentist. Jordan began his career in broadcast journalism by serving as a booth announcer for WSM-TV in Nashville, Tennessee. That same year, he was married to Sharon E. Lundy. Then, in 1973 he was hired as a general assignment reporter for WGN-TV in Chicago, Illinois. Jordan worked for the WGN-TV One o'clock news while pursuing his B.A. degree at Roosevelt University in Chicago.

After graduating from Roosevelt University in 1977, Jordan joined the CBS News Midwest bureau in Chicago. He worked there for two years, covering stories throughout the Midwest, for the Evening News with Walter Cronkite. In 1980, Jordan returned to WGN-TV's news team where he wrote and produced several stories including a documentary on the Atlanta Child Murders. He also went on to write a series on the nationalization of the U.S. dollar entitled "Peso Rich; Dollar Poor". During the 1980s, Jordan served as a board member and trustee for the Chicago Sinfonietta, John Shedd Aquarium (where he currently continues to be an active trustee) and Evanston Hospital.

In 1994, Jordan decided to further his education by earning his M.A. degree in speech from Northeastern Illinois University. He would later earn his Ph.D. in philosophy of education with a minor in ethics in 2000, from Loyola University Chicago.

Aside from working as an anchorman, Jordan has written two screenplays, *Anthony's Key* and *Multiman*. In 1995, he joined the board of the Safer Foundation and the following year, Jordan became a board member at the Night Ministry. He founded his own production company, Jordan & Jordan Communications, Inc. in 1997.

Jordan lives with his wife, Sharon, in Lincolnwood, Illinois. They have one daughter, Karen, also a reporter/anchor in Chicago. Her husband, Christian Farr, is a reporter/anchor with the PBS station in Chicago.

Jordan was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 18, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 18, 2008, in Lincolnwood, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television news anchor Robert H. Jordan, Jr. (1943 -) was an anchor and reporter for WGN-TV News in Chicago, Illinois. He founded his own production company and has written two screenplays.

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, Robert H., Jr., 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Jordan, Robert H., Jr., 1943- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Television News Anchor

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Robert H. Jordan, Jr., February 18, 2008. 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 Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_001, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. was born on August 31, 1943 in Atlanta, Georgia to Millicent Dobbs Jordan and Robert H. Jordan, Sr. His maternal grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, was born in Georgia to former slaves, and became a

wealthy railway postal clerk. He was also the grand master of Atlanta's Masons and the civic leader of Auburn Avenue, the city's black business district. Jordan's maternal grandfather emphasized the value of education to his six daughters, each of whom graduated from Spelman College. Jordan's oldest maternal aunt, Irene Dobbs Jackson, studied in France to become a concert pianist; and another aunt, Mattiwilda Dobbs Janson, was the first African American to sing a romantic role at the Metropolitan Opera. Jordan's maternal cousin, Maynard Jackson, later became Atlanta's first black mayor. As a young boy, Jordan lived with his maternal grandfather while his father served in World War II, and accompanied his grandfather on visits to community leaders like Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_002, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr.'s maternal grandfather, John Wesley Dobbs, grew up in Kennesaw, Georgia, and encouraged his six daughters to question authority. Jordan's paternal grandmother was the child of a Buffalo Soldier and a Native American woman. After she married Jordan's paternal grandfather, they lived in the all-black town of Wybark, Oklahoma, and then moved to Kansas City, Kansas. There, Jordan's paternal grandfather worked for the city during the Great Depression. Jordan's father attended the University of Kansas and then the University of Arkansas, where he met Jordan's mother. Later, his father served in World War II; and, during this time, Jordan lived with his mother in Atlanta, Georgia. His family later moved to Nashville, Tennessee. Jordan's mother taught college courses, and eventually returned to her alma mater, Spelman College, as a professor of literature, drama and black studies. In the 1970s, she organized the takeover of an administrative building to demand a female president of the college.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_003, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. moved with his family in 1945 to Nashville, Tennessee, where he attended Ford Greene Elementary School, and his parents taught at Tennessee State University. Later, his father enrolled at Meharry Medical College; and, after he completed a dentistry degree in 1955, the family returned to Atlanta, Georgia. There, Jordan attended Nathan B. Forrest Junior High School, and then David T. Howard High School, where he played varsity basketball with Walt Frazier. After his family moved to Collier Heights, Jordan transferred to Henry McNeal Turner High School. He played the French horn, and saw his future wife for the first time at a band convention. Upon graduating in 1961, Jordan enrolled at Morehouse College with plans to study medicine; and met his wife, who attended Spelman College. Jordan excelled in biology, but struggled with math, and was drafted into the Vietnam War because of low grades. He opted to complete a three-year term of service in order to attend surgical school.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_004, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. served in the U.S. Army at a base in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he worked in a civilian hospital at night. He then served in a mobile hospital unit at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, before leaving the U.S. Army to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He worked part-time in the operating room at Meharry Medical College, where the doctors encouraged him to enroll as a medical student. Unsure of his aspirations, Jordan began working at Nashville's WSM-TV in 1970, and discovered his talent in broadcasting.

Jordan was the first African American to work on the air at WSM-TV, and broke many of Nashville's racial barriers, such as entering through the front door of the Belle Meade Country Club. In 1973, Jordan became a general reporter at WGN-TV in Chicago, Illinois. There, he worked with other African American television reporters, including Merri Dee and Floyd Brown. In 1977, Jordan left WGN-TV, and accepted a position at WBBM-TV.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_005, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. enrolled at Roosevelt University with the encouragement of his wife, and completed a bachelor's degree in 1977. He left WGN-TV that year, and began working as a reporter for the 'CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite.' Jordan covered news stories throughout the Midwest region, including serial killer John Wayne Gacy; Harold Washington's mayoral campaign in Chicago, Illinois; and the tenth anniversary of the Kerner Report. Due to the stress of constant travel, Jordan returned to WGN-TV as an anchor in 1980, and became well-known as far away as Colombia. While covering Congressman Mel Reynolds' sexual abuse scandal, Jordan was criticized for overlooking the murder of two teenage boys. This prompted him to pursue a master's degree from Northeastern Illinois University in 1994. He went on to write a doctoral dissertation about how television producers select homicides to cover. Through his research, he found that a victim's prominence is the biggest factor in how stories are prioritized.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_006, TRT: 0:29:28 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. decided to open a production company after creating a video biography of a friend who had recently passed away. He gave the tape to her children, who enjoyed it so much that Jordan founded Jordan and Jordan Communications, Inc. His clientele were mostly wealthy individuals hoping to preserve their family legacy. Jordan also served on a number of nonprofit boards, including the Shedd Aquarium, Howard Brown Health, the Night Ministry and the Safer Foundation. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer, Jordan wrote an article for the Chicago Tribune about his experiences during treatment. The story touched many people, and provided support and encouragement to others suffering from prostate cancer. At the time of the interview, Jordan was an anchor on WGN-TV, and his only daughter worked in television news as well. He describes his concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert H. Jordan, Jr., Section A2008_018_001_007, TRT: 0:07:38 ?

Robert H. Jordan, Jr. narrates his photographs.