

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert Jackson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jackson, Robert, 1950-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson,
Dates:	December 1, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:05:26).
Abstract:	City council member Robert Jackson (1950 -) served on the New York City Council from 2001 to 2013, and founded the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Jackson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 1, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_111
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

City council member Robert Jackson was born on December 18, 1950 in New York City to Zelma Jackson Chu. Jackson attended Walter J. Damrosch School and J.H.S. 120 Paul Lawrence Dunbar. In 1975, he received his B.A. degree in sociology from the State University of New York at New Paltz. That same year, Jackson moved to the Manhattan community of Washington Heights.

Jackson's political career began in 1986, when he won a seat on New York City's Community School Board 6. As president of the board, Jackson co-founded in 1993 the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. with Attorney Michael Rebell. Under

the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Jackson sued the State of New York, arguing that the state did not provide adequate funds to serve the needs of New York City's school children. In 1995, the New York Court of Appeals decided *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York* in Jackson's favor. Jackson accepted a position in 1993 as director of field services with the Public Employees Federation. In 2001, Jackson ran for a seat on the New York City Council and won, where he represented the constituents of the Washington Heights community and parts of Harlem. When Governor George Pataki brought *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York* before the New York Court of Appeals in 2003, Jackson staged a march from New York City to the state capital of Albany. The Court of Appeals upheld the New York Supreme Court's original decision, and the New York State legislature enacted the Education Budget and Reform Act in 2007. In 2011, Jackson staged another protest walk from New York City to Albany, New York to contest Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposed \$1.5 billion cut to the New York State's education budget. Jackson won re-election to the New York City Council twice, serving until 2013.

During his tenure as councilman, Jackson served as the only Muslim member of the council as well as the chair of the education committee in addition to serving on the finance, housing & buildings, land use, sanitation & solid waste management, and zoning & franchises committees.

A long time resident of New York City, Jackson's wife, Faika Rifai Jackson, have two daughters.

Robert Jackson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 1, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Robert Jackson was conducted by Harriette Cole on December 1, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. City council member Robert Jackson (1950 -) served on the New York City Council from 2001 to 2013, and founded the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

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:

Jackson, Robert, 1950-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Jackson, Robert, 1950---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

New York (City). Council

Occupations:

City Council Member

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Jackson, December 1, 2016. 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 Robert Jackson, Section
A2016_111_001_001, TRT: 1:29:36 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson was born on December 18, 1950 in New York City to Zelma Jackson Chu. Jackson's mother was raised by her mother and grandmother, Emma Willingham Jackson and Emma Willingham, in Athens, Georgia. After Jackson's grandmother died in childbirth, his mother lived briefly with an aunt in Chicago, Illinois, and then moved with Jackson's great aunt, Bobbie Willingham, to New York City. There, Jackson lived with his mother on 148th Street in the Sugar Hill section of Harlem. Jackson did not know his biological father. Instead, he was raised by his stepfather, Eddie Chu, who emigrated from China during the 1920s and became a partner in a large laundry company in New York City. Jackson also received paternal guidance from James Rudd, who was the father of several of Jackson's siblings. Rudd was born in Danville, Virginia, and worked for the New York City Administration for Children's Services.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson, Section
A2016_111_001_002, TRT: 2:28:53 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson grew up in a blended family in New York City's Harlem neighborhood. He had eight half-siblings who were the children of his stepfather, Eddie Chu, and a close family friend, James Rudd. Although some of the children's physical traits showed which man was their biological father, both Chu and Rudd treated all of Jackson's siblings as their children. During his childhood, Jackson often accompanied his stepfather to Chinatown, where they shopped for groceries and visited the

barbershop. In Harlem, Jackson was bullied by the neighborhood children for having a Chinese stepfather. He began his education at P.S. 186, where the student body was predominantly African American. To earn extra money, Jackson sold newspapers and worked at Rob's Barbeque and Grocery Store after class. In 1963, he moved with his family to the Bronx, New York, where he attended P.S. 146 and Paul Laurence Dunbar J.H.S. 120. Jackson went on to enroll at Benjamin Franklin High School, where he joined the track team.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson, Section A2016_111_001_003, TRT: 3:32:41 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson attended Benjamin Franklin High School in New York City, where he ran track under Coach Irwin Goldberg. Through Goldberg, Jackson became involved with the Upward Bound program, which helped low income students prepare for college. After graduating from high school in 1969, Jackson enrolled at the State University of New York at New Paltz through the Educational Opportunity Program. He majored in sociology and urban studies, and served as president of the black student union, which was called Blacks for Black Liberation. During his sophomore year, Jackson met his future wife, Faika Rifai Jackson, who was an international student from Tanzania. Upon graduating, Jackson became an insurance investigator for the State of New York. After five years in that role, he joined the staff of the New York State Public Employees Federation. Jackson went on to serve as a member of the New York City Community School Board District 6 and the New York City Council.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson, Section A2016_111_001_004, TRT: 4:29:20 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson converted to Islam and married Faika Rifai Jackson in 1975. Their first child, Saadiya Jackson Owens, was born shortly afterwards. At that time, Jackson was living in New York City, while his wife completed her degree at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Jackson and his wife went on to have two more daughters, who attended P.S.I.S. 187, Hudson Cliffs School in New York City. There, Jackson joined the parent association and became a member of its executive board. In 1986, he

ran for the New York City Community School Board District 6, where he eventually served as president. In 1993, the State of New York began implementing massive budget cuts in the district. That year, Jackson partnered with attorney Michael A. Rebell to found the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, and filed suit against the State of New York. During the subsequent thirteen years of litigation, Jackson was elected to the New York City Council and led two protest marches to Albany, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson, Section
A2016_111_001_005, TRT: 5:32:29 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson and Michael A. Rebell founded the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) in 1993, in order to sue the State of New York for underfunding the New York City public schools. While Rebell litigated the case, Jackson raised awareness by organizing the Walk a Mile for a Child marches from New York City to the state capitol in Albany, New York. In 2005, New York Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse ruled in favor of the CFE. One year later, an Appellate Division court ordered the State of New York to provide over \$10 billion in aid and capital funds to the New York City public schools, resulting in the passage of the Education Budget and Reform Act of 2007. At the time of the interview in 2016, the state had not fully met the court mandates, and two new lawsuits were pending. At this point, Jackson talks about the state of public education in New York City and the United States, and reflects upon the rise of charter schools.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert Jackson, Section
A2016_111_001_006, TRT: 6:32:27 2016/12/01

Robert Jackson cofounded the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) with Michael A. Rebell. Through the organization, they filed a lawsuit against the State of New York to protect students' right to education in the New York City public schools. Jackson served as the chairman of the CFE until 2001. That year, he was elected to the New York City Council, where he headed the Committee on Education. In 2013, Jackson was no longer eligible to serve on the city council because of term limits, and campaigned unsuccessfully for borough president of Manhattan. In

2016, he launched a bid for a seat in the New York State Senate, but lost to Marisol Alcantara. Jackson reflects upon the presidential election of 2016, and describes his plans for the future. He also talks about his experiences as a Muslim political leader. Jackson reflects upon his life and legacy, and shares his advice for aspiring politicians. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his family's cultural diversity.