

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Ron Kirk

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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>	Kirk, Ron
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 25, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:14:12).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mayor The Honorable Ron Kirk (1954 - ) was the first African American mayor of Dallas, Texas, served as the Texas Secretary of State and was appointed U.S. Trade Representative by President Barack Obama. Kirk was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 25, 2004, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_214
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former Mayor of Dallas Ron Kirk was born in Austin, Texas on June 27, 1954. While attending John H. Reagan High School, Kirk was elected president of the student body. He also played basketball and traveled in Europe with the school choir. Upon graduation in 1972, Kirk enrolled in Austin College, where he earned his B.A. degree in 1976 with honors in political science and sociology. From there, he went on to earn his J.D. degree from the University of Texas School of Law in Austin.

Kirk then moved to Dallas and began practicing law with the firm of Bennett & Cain. In 1981, he left private practice and went to work for then Texas Senator Lloyd Bentsen. When Bentsen was appointed U.S. Secretary of the Treasury by President Bill Clinton, Kirk accompanied him to Washington, D.C. In 1994, he left Washington and returned to his native Texas, where he became Secretary of State under Texas governor Ann Richards. The following year, at the urging of the Dallas business community, Kirk ran for mayor of Dallas, and won sixty-two percent of the vote, becoming the first African American mayor of Dallas, and of any major Texas city. As mayor, Kirk gained a reputation for building coalitions. He also instituted the “Dallas Plan,” his vision for the City of Dallas. Kirk was widely credited with jump-starting the city’s economy. In 1999, Kirk was reelected in a landslide election, winning seventy-four percent of the vote. He stepped down as mayor in 2001 and ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate seat vacated by Phil Gramm. Kirk returned to private practice, joining the firm of Gardere Wynne Sewell, where he served as a partner. In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Kirk as U.S. Trade Representative.

Kirk remains active in the community, as former president of the Dallas Zoological Society and as chair of the South Dallas/Fair Park Trust Fund Advisory Board. He also serves as a trustee of Austin College, as well as on the board of directors for Brinker International, Dean Foods and PetSmart.

Kirk and his wife, Matrice Ellis-Kirk, have two daughters.

Kirk was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 25, 2004.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 25, 2004, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mayor The Honorable Ron Kirk (1954 - ) was the first African American mayor of Dallas, Texas, served as the Texas Secretary of State and was appointed U.S. Trade Representative by President Barack Obama.

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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:

Kirk, Ron

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Kirk, Ron--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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Dallas (Tex.)

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### Occupations:

Mayor

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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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 The Honorable Ron Kirk, October 25, 2004. 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).

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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 The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk was born June 27, 1954 in Austin, Texas to Willie

Jones and Lee Kirk. His mother was born in Manor, Texas in 1921. She was one of fourteen siblings and had a twin brother; her parents died while she was young. She worked as an elementary school teacher in Austin and as a volunteer singer at United Service Organization clubs. She met Kirk's father at Huston-Tillotson College in Houston, Texas. Kirk's father was born in San Antonio, Texas. He served in the U.S. military during the Korean War and aspired to be a physician. After being accepted to Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, he was unable to go. Instead, he worked to support his family and became the first African American postal clerk in Austin with the help of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Kirk's paternal great-grandfather was a Buffalo Soldier. Kirk talks about discriminatory rules, like poll taxes, that were implemented to prevent African Americans from voting in the South.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk lived in an all-black area of the East Austin neighborhood of Austin, Texas. As a child, Kirk loved playing outside despite the Texas heat. He often played near the Texas State Capitol, but was unable to use the bathroom or drink water there due to its segregated facilities. His uncle owned the popular Charlie's Playhouse club in East Austin. Through his parents, Kirk met musician Louis Jordan. Kirk learned to play cello via University of Texas' Junior Strings Program and helped build his family's Church of the New Testament. He attended Blackshear Elementary School, University Junior High School and J.E. Pearce Junior High School, all in Austin. He was inspired to take pride in himself by Blackshear's principal, Friendly Rice. His middle school years were during the first wave of integration in Austin. Kirk aspired to become a lawyer after learning about Thurgood Marshall from his parents. His favorite TV show was 'Perry Mason.' He graduated from John H. Reagan High School in 1972.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk attended John H. Reagan High School in Austin, Texas. While there, he played junior varsity basketball, toured Europe several times as part of the school choir, and was the second black class president. As a student in a newly integrated school, Kirk experienced discrimination while also feeling adrift from his own community. His oldest sister held meetings for student activist groups in his home, which shaped his political outlook; he also watched televised political conventions and read the works of Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1972, Kirk enrolled at Austin College in Sherman, Texas and was influenced by Dr. Shelton Williams and Dr. Kenneth Street. He took a semester off and interned with Price Daniel during Texas's constitutional convention, then returned to college and graduated with honors in 1976. Kirk worked for the U.S. Census Bureau briefly. He graduated from University of Texas at Austin School of Law in 1976.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk played on Charles Alan Wright's football team, the Legal Eagles, while attending University of Texas at Austin School of Law. He became interested in personal injury law while a legal clerk at Spivey & Grigg in Austin. Upon graduation in 1979, Kirk declined an opportunity to work for Legal Services Corporation. Instead, he learned to be a trial lawyer while

employed by Bennett & Cain and Turley Law Firm in Dallas, Texas. In 1981, Kirk became a defense and budget staffer for Senator Lloyd Bentsen in Washington, D.C. Although initially shocked by the crime, he enjoyed living in a majority African American city. Kirk worked with Senator John Tower despite their party differences. His friend, Vonciel Jones Hill, recommended him for chief lobbyist for the City of Dallas, and in 1982, he was hired by Dallas' first female city attorney as the city's first black lobbyist. Kirk met his wife, Matrice Ellis, at a fundraiser for The Black Academy of Arts and Letters in 1984. They married in 1987.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk and Matrice Ellis-Kirk had their first child in 1989. He returned to private law practice at Johnson & Gibbs in Dallas, Texas in 1990. As chair of the Texas State Purchasing and General Services Commission, he increased the number of state contracts for minority-owned companies eightfold. In 1994, Kirk was appointed Texas secretary of state by Governor Ann Richards. He presided over the 1994 gubernatorial election in which the incumbent Richards lost to future President George Walker Bush. In the spring of 1995, Kirk ran for mayor of Dallas and won with over 60 percent of the vote. He ran on a conciliatory platform that attempted to unite the fractious multi-ethnic city. As mayor, Kirk reformed the reputation of the city council. Kirk remained in his partnership at Johnson & Gibbs law firm during his mayoral term. Kirk also speculates on Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris' role in the vote recount during the presidential election of 2000.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_006, TRT: 0:28:22 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk snuck into the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C. to see Nelson Mandela speak after his release from prison in 1990. Kirk served as mayor of Dallas, Texas from 1995 to 2001. As mayor, he pushed for the construction of the American Airlines Center sports arena in Dallas, urged other cities not to pull out of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit project and broke ground on its construction. He passed the largest bond program in the city's history and devoted half of it to urban redevelopment. He also met South President F.W. de Klerk on a trade mission to South Africa. In 2001, Kirk resigned mid-term to run for a United States Senate seat. He raised \$3 million in five months but lost to Republican John Cornyn. He returned to his partnership at Gardere, Wynne & Sewell LLP law firm when his loss was announced. At the time of the interview, Kirk was continuing his work there. Kirk reflects upon his senate race, his career plans, and his hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Ron Kirk, Section A2004\_214\_001\_007, TRT: 0:19:00 ?

The Honorable Ron Kirk met an elderly African American constituent during his mayoral campaign who told him that she never thought she would see Dallas, Texas elect an African American mayor. This encounter motivated Kirk's integrity throughout his mayoral tenure. Kirk reflects upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes his interview by narrating his photographs.