

Leon Jordan

Police Detective and Political Leader
1905-1970

by David Conrads

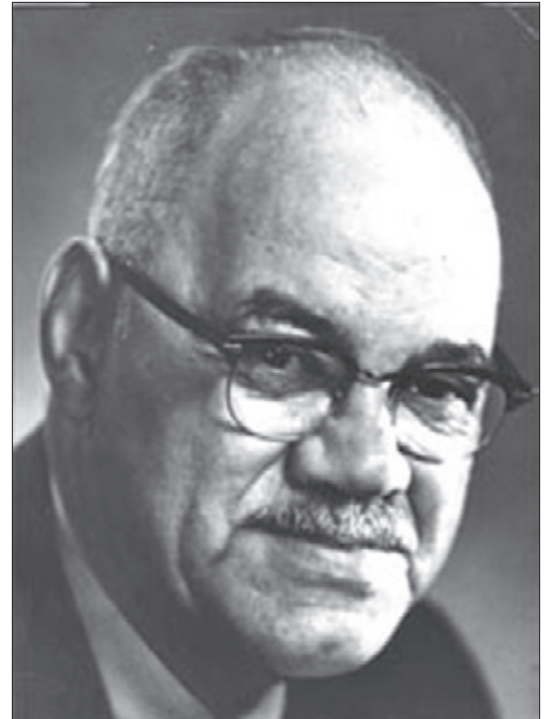
In 1970, Leon Jordan was arguably the most powerful African American in the state of Missouri. A cofounder and leader of the black political club Freedom Inc., Jordan served three terms in the Missouri House of Representatives. At the time of his death, he was remembered as a political leader of power and influence and one of the most effective and distinguished members of the Missouri House, where he was a candidate for his fourth term.

A Kansas City native, Leon Jordan pursued many vocations in a long and colorful career. He graduated from Wilburforce University, in Wilburforce, Ohio, and later worked as a social case worker and teacher. In 1938 he joined the Kansas City Police Department, where he served for 16 years and became the first African American to achieve the rank of lieutenant. He was granted an extended leave of absence in 1947 and lived for eight years in the West African country of Liberia, where he reorganized a 450-man police force. Jordan left police work soon after his return from Liberia and launched both a business and political career.

Jordan was first elected to public office in 1958. He founded Freedom Inc. in 1962, with Bruce Watkins, his longtime friend and ally in inner-city political affairs. The club was established to give black voters more influence and to develop black candidates for political office. In 1963, under Jordan's leadership and with a public accommodations ordinance on the ballot, Freedom Inc. conducted one of the most massive voter registration drives ever seen in Kansas City.

Jordan was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives in 1964. He also owned and operated the Green Duck tavern at 2548 Prospect Avenue. Jordan was assassinated shot at close range in a gangland-style killing in the early morning hours of July 15, 1970, as he was closing his tavern. Although charges were brought against two individuals, no one was ever convicted and Jordan's murder remains unsolved.

The Leon M. Jordan Memorial Park at 31st Street and Benton



Boulevard, which features a statue of the slain leader, was dedicated in 1975.

Sources

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"Varied Career Led Jordan to Politics." *The Kansas City Star*, 15 July 1970.

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