

## VII

## First Career: Becomes a Policeman

In 1936 Jordan finally found a job that promised him decent pay and a chance for the future. He probably met Boss Tom Pendergast personally in his office, as recruits for the Kansas City Police Department were commonly required to do. He later acknowledged Pendergast remembered his father, and that probably won him a job on the police department. He would be a member of the department for the next sixteen years, although the last five of those years were spent on leave while he headed the constabulary of Liberia. It was the beginning of a long and deep commitment to police work.



He filled out his application on Dec. 14, 1936, and was hired, Dec. 21. He was six feet two inches tall and weighed 215 pounds, a weight he carried easily. He listed his army service, described himself as married, but under “No. of children” he wrote an “Adopted girl”. On two other personnel documents in his file during the next two years, after “dependents,” he lists two. As mentioned above, Jackie Rhodes, who met Leon in Denver, where she grew up, and whose parents knew Leon’s parents from Kansas City days, remembers a quick, bright, young girl named Lavira living with the Jordans. But Rhodes thought she didn’t live with the Jordans for very long. When asked why, she thought the girl was too dark skinned to suit Orchid. She

thought the latter treated the young girl like a maid. The 1940 census confirms Lavira Smith, living with the Jordans as an adopted daughter.

In an interview with an FBI agent after her husband's death, Orchid Jordan said that Leon had a relationship with an Edith Massey Thomas which began prior to their marriage and continued while Leon was on the police force. She said that it was "rumored" that there was a child as a product of this relationship. While insisting she was not certain this was so, she named the child, Dorothy Louise Massey, and described her as living in Kansas City at the time of the interview. She seemed to know a good deal about Thomas, whom she described as having married while the Jordans were in Liberia. Orchid understood Thomas was in the military, and that her marriage did not last long. She was employed by the Internal Revenue Service in Kansas City, but subsequently moved to Los Angeles where she worked for the Goldring Company, located in the 8000 block of Sunset Boulevard. Orchid indicated that she had discussed this relationship with her husband many times and believed that the relationship had ended years ago.

Jackie Rhodes remembers Edith Massey clearly. She was a tall good looking woman, whom Leon was very fond of. Jackie remembers riding on occasion in the patrol car with Leon and Cliff Warren, and then being taken to the Chez Paris to sit with Edith. She also remembers that when she was teaching physical education at Lincoln University in the early forties Leon would come to Lincoln with Chester McAfee on Sundays to see Edith. She felt sure that Leon was paying for Edith's education at Lincoln.

Rhodes remembers that Leon was also close friends with Ethalyn Richardson, who performed at the Chez Paris with her husband Bill as part of a dance team. Later Ethalyn would occasionally meet Leon when he traveled to Denver. Ethalyn Richardson divorced Bill, but

remained good friends with him even after remarrying. On the night of Leon's murder, Ethalyn Stevenson Gordon had just flown into Kansas City. She called Leon that evening. As he exited the Green Duck, he was carrying a bottle of brandy on his way to meet her, when his life was ended by blasts from a shot gun. A photo of Ethalyn as a very attractive young woman with an inscription addressed to "Sister Orchid, Luck and Success Always. from Lil Sis, Ethalyn," survives as part of the Jordan Collection. Orchid acknowledged to the FBI that Ethalyn was a longtime friend, chiefly of her husband's.

Orchid makes no mention of Lavira Smith. She seems in fact by suggesting that it was rumored that Leon had a child before their marriage and that the mother was probably Edith Massey to be leading the agent away from any knowledge of Lavira. That Lavira lived with the Jordans from the 1940 census through Jordan's early years on the police force is almost certain. Immediately after Leon's death, and not completely certain what kind of estate Leon had left her, Orchid would not like to draw public attention to someone who might have a claim on whatever that estate might be. Yet Orchid's acknowledgement of the rumor that Leon had fathered a child before their marriage, even though she was leading the agent from any awareness that that child might be Lavira Smith, seems a semi-conscious acknowledgement.

Listening to Rhodes tell me of these women in Jordan's life in such a matter of fact manner I could not help also being struck by the warmth and affection with which she remembered Leon. At one point she drifted back into her memories for a long pause, and just as I thought of repeating a question, she awoke, shook her head, and smiled, "That man sure could dance." She made it very clear that despite his carrying on with other women she liked this man. It was an attitude I would find repeated in other instances.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Physical Examination for Employment and 1935-36 Employment Records, KCPD Personnel File, LJC; Interview with Orchid Jordan, August 6, 1970, FBI file, LJC; Interview with Jackie Rhodes, March 3, 2008.

The year Jordan joined the police department Tom Pendergast was at the height of his power in Kansas City and in the state of Missouri. Indeed his power at this point reached into the White House through Jim Farley, and into the U.S. Senate with Harry Truman. During the early thirties there was a widespread belief among all classes that the Pendergast organization had steered Kansas City through the depression with minimum business anxiety and unemployment. Pendergast was then seen by many as a successful businessman as well as a political leader and many prominent figures in the community were happy to be recognized as his friends. Lloyd C. Stark became governor of the state with the essential support of Pendergast. Then in 1936, the same year Jordan joined the police department, despite many promises of loyalty, Stark turned against Pendergast and began to use all the powers of his office to bring the political leader down.

In 1932 the Democrats with much support from the local business community had brought the police department under home rule. Not only was Pendergast happy, but the black community at first greeted the move with relief. Chester A. Franklin, generally considered a strong Republican, noted in *The Call* about the first election after home rule had been established: "The 'boss' issue raised by the Republicans is downright puerile. It is not how much power T. J. Pendergast has but what he does with it, that concerns the people. . . .If the Pendergast organization had done nothing more than remove the menace of brutal and unfriendly police from us, putting a stop to the clubbing and imprisonment of innocent Negroes, it would deserve our thanks. Coming on the heels of the Field-Behrendt [former Police commissioners], when official outrages reached their highest, the difference is marked."

Regrettably several spectacular crimes gave the wider public a sharply different perspective on the police department: the Union Station Massacre, the machine-gun killing of

Johnny Lazia, the 1934 election day massacre, which left four people dead, and the kidnappings of Mary McElroy, the daughter of city manager, Henry Mc Elroy, and that of Nell Donnelly, prominent local businesswoman.

The police department in fact became the underbelly of the Pendergast organization. Kansas City became a wide open city for gambling and prostitution. Crime leaders in trouble elsewhere thought of Kansas City as a safe haven. The police were often well paid to look the other way and were warned to be careful about whom they arrested. This wide open night life had its positives. It was the heyday of Kansas City jazz. The clubs of Kansas City, open for long hours into the morning, featured some of the best music in the land then adding a new dimension to jazz, America's signature music tradition.<sup>44</sup>

Reed Hoover remembered another Leon Jordan incident that catches some of the flavor of those days in Kansas City. Hoover and his wife with three other white couples went to Felix Payne's Eastside Musicians' Sunset Club on a Saturday night. They were the only whites in the club and by 1:30 a.m. they were rather drunk. One of the men of their party, whom Jordan knew and disliked, began to mimic the other dancers on the floor. He was too drunk to realize the resentment he created or to respond to his friends' efforts to straighten him out. The atmosphere grew tense. Hoover, knowing Jordan was a friend of Payne's, phoned Jordan to see if he could talk to someone in the club to cool things off. Jordan listened to Hoover's story, told him to go back to the table, hobble the show-off, and sit still.

In about ten minutes Jordan burst through the front door. He knew everybody in the place and was immediately greeted enthusiastically by all. "Suddenly he seemed to discover our lily-white table. 'Hey Kelse,' he shouted, 'What in hell you doin' here?'" He ran across, greeted

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<sup>44</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, pp. 118-137; *The Call*, October 14, 1932.

Beth and me, sat down and ordered a round of drinks. The atmosphere turned from hostile to neutral. He had doubtless saved a stupid friend from a most unpleasant experience.”

By the 1930's and 1940's Felix Payne was a legendary figure. Born in Marshall, Missouri, in 1884, he came to Kansas City a year before Leon M. Jordan was born. He began his career as—what else—a barber on Fourth Street. By 1906 he operated a tavern called the Twin City Club within the western edge of the downtown district. He bought real estate, ran gambling operations, and eventually opened at least three other nightclubs, the Subway at 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine, the same East Side Musicians Club that Reed Hoover and his friends visited, and the Chauffeurs Club. He became coowner of the Kansas City, Kansas, Giants baseball team. He went into business with both Thomas “Big Piney” Brown and his brother, Walter “Little Piney” Brown, who was immortalized in Big Joe Turner's “Piney Brown Blues.” He was also a very gifted amateur tennis player who often represented Kansas City in team matches with St. Louis. He was an electrifying speaker, who worked diligently for the Democratic Party, and was often invited to speak to white as well as black audiences. With Dr. William Thompkins he began the *Kansas City American* newspaper to rival the *Call*, whose politics were staunchly Republican.

In Robert Altman's film *Kansas City*, Harry Belafonte plays a jazz era hoodlum named Seldom Seen. Seldom Seen is a nickname for a small timer named Ivory Johnson. But many believe the darker side of Felix Payne provided much of the historical basis for the character Belafonte played. At any rate Payne worked closely with Tom Pendergast, and he almost certainly knew Leon H. Jordan, Leon M's father. There is a photo of Leon M. Jordan with Felix Payne, and Everett P. O'Neal as members of the leading men's social club, the Beau Brummel

Club, taken in 1942. Felix Payne was likely a frequent reminder to the younger Leon Jordan of the political and social success his father had once achieved.<sup>45</sup>

Federal District Attorney Maurice Milligan began damaging investigations of the 1936 local elections soon after they were completed. His successful prosecution gained momentum over the next two years. By 1938 Gov. Lloyd Stark saw his opportunity to challenge Pendergast's power in the state by portraying himself as a reform candidate. In the 1938 elections Pendergast and his machine still did very well in the Kansas City election, but Milligan and Stark had now gained the ear of the Roosevelt administration. They sparked a federal investigation of Pendergast's evasion of taxes which eventually brought the boss down.

Stark knew that the Kansas City Police Department protected the illegal sale of liquor and gambling. He had his attorney general try to enforce the state laws governing these activities. He then used his power as governor successfully to urge the state legislature to return the Kansas City police department to state control. In July, 1939 ex-FBI man, Lear B. Reed, was installed as the new Chief of Police and a drastic effort to reform the department was begun.

In an interview in New York City on his way to Liberia in 1947, Leon Jordan remembered his early days in the Kansas City Police Department. In 1936 when he enlisted they had about 13 or 14 Negroes on the force, "and Kansas City was one of the worst police forces in the country. In 1938 when the state and federal governments stepped in to clean up things less than 150 of the 800 strong police force was able to survive the probe into departmental corruption. . . .Every mother's son had to take a mental and physical examination. I was busted from uniformed sergeant to a class "A" patrolman, but I regained my sergeant's post eight months later."

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<sup>45</sup> Reed Hoover to Orchid Jordan, May 20, 1975, LJC; David Conrad's *Biography of Felix Payne, 1884-1962*, KCPL Local History website; Glenn E. Rice on Altman's film, *Kansas City Star*, June 6, 1996.



In the 1930's J. Edgar Hoover became a national hero, and the FBI was replacing the cowboy in the white hat as the popular answer to corruption in story and film. But Hoover and the FBI were also creating a new mythical aura for fighting crime. Their methods were "scientific." Fingerprinting was then a new and exciting crime fighting tool, much as DNA is today. Lear Reed was chosen for his job because he was an FBI agent. He paid tribute to Hoover and mentioned his FBI training over and over again as he transformed the Kansas City Police Department into a straight-laced, earnest, technologically competent police force. Jordan learned and participated in this transformation. He would take many of the lessons he learned from this transformation into his effort to organize the Monrovia police force in Liberia many years later.



But Jordan's view of crime and its source was not the same as that of J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover thought those who explained crime as rising from environmental causes were weak-kneed liberals. In contrast Jordan always believed that "prevention of crime is better than punishing the criminal; that a bad environment produces the criminal, and that 'third degree' methods should have no place in police activity." Jordan's own troubled early years gave him empathy for young people in trouble. "I like to get back to a lad's early life, his family, his likes and dislikes. . . .I may talk to a boy, for example, about the last time he went fishing. You've got to have a case history of the individual, and understand his relation to his environment. You know the effect. You've got to find the cause that brings him to the police before you can deal with him." He admitted, however, that he had not yet won over all his colleagues to his methods.<sup>46</sup>

Remembering his early police experiences, Jordan acknowledged the early training he received in police work from veterans Robert W. Lee and John W. Burns. He also praised the training he received in detective work from Les W. Kircher. But the 1939 transformation of the police department also brought him a new and significant partner, Clifford Warren. Warren and Jordan not only worked closely together as detectives, but they became lifelong family friends.

In 1939 Jordan also made a significant residential move. He and Orchid moved from their substantial home on 2448 W. Paseo to 2745 Garfield. At that time 27<sup>th</sup> Street was considered the dividing line between the white and black community. So the




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<sup>46</sup> Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine*, pp. 91-117; Ferrell, *Truman and Pendergast*, pp. 31-61; Larsen, *Pendergast!*; Lear B. Reed, *Human Wolves*, p. 179; *The Voice of the People*, NYC, Dec. 6, 1947; Richard Gid Powers, *Secrecy and Power*, pp. 189-219.

Jordans' move south of 27<sup>th</sup> Street, like Leon's mother's move to 2448 Paseo, was a racial adventure. Their new home was a duplex, so it again provided the possibility of rental income.

Early on Jordan and Warren were among four officers who received special praise from F. S. Smith, Executive Secretary of the Paseo YMCA, for their work in bringing in new members to the Y's Boys' Club. Theodore Pugh, Coordinator of the Negro Playgrounds of Kansas City, praised Jordan and Warren's work during the summer 1940 season, when the large crowds reached an all time high of over 10,000 on Aug. 1. Such a "safe and sane season" would not have been possible without the able assistance of these officers.

On May 12, 1941, Jordan was designated director of the American Youth Club and directed to report to Capt. Frank F. Dobbs. Dobbs would keep in touch with Jordan the rest of his life. He called Jordan from California the day before he was murdered. In July, 1941, Thomas Webster, Director of the Urban League, requested Jordan be given leave to attend the annual Urban League Conference at Camp Green Pastures, forty miles outside Detroit. Acting Chief Harold Anderson granted the leave.

In July, 1942, Jordan and Warren's work as Class A patrolmen in the burglary and robbery unit paid off. They were both promoted to Detectives and given a \$25 a month raise. Jordan received Badge No. 33, Warren No. 44. They were given a 1942 model car to ride in, fully equipped with a long distance rifle, riot gun, two way radio and other standard police car equipment. They were heralded by *The Call* as "the first Negro detectives on the force since the police department went under state control in 1939."

Jordan and Warren's achievements shared the *Call*'s attention with the arrival in Kansas City of Corporal Joe Louis, enormously popular heavyweight boxing champion of the world, on his way to Fort Riley. Louis's enlistment in the army soon after Pearl Harbor, along with his

decisive defeat of Max Schmeling, who somewhat unfairly got tagged as representing Nazi Germany, promoted him to iconic status in America for both white and black citizens. Soon after his arrival at Fort Riley, Louis competed in the Hope of America golf tourney in Kansas City, finishing second to De Arthur Gray. A week later, with characteristic grand generosity, he gave a party for all the troops in the Ft. Riley area. Over 2,500 attended.

These events give context to a story Tom Webster later told in a talk commemorating the heritage of 18th Street and Vine in 1984: “I remember one afternoon when Leon Jordan, Joe Lewis [sic] and Satchel Paige congregated on the corner. Joe had just been inducted in the army and was stationed at Fort Riley. Satchel was pleading with Leon to spare Joe of the ‘wuppin’ he would give him if he kept on challenging him to a game of pool in Jones’ billiard parlor. Satchel said, ‘Tell the man I got my name in the record book. In the big book at that.’ Joe inquired what he was talking about when Satchel informed him that his name was in the Bible which said that he was known as ‘John, the pooler.’ Satchel then proceeded to give Joe the lesson and the whipping he had promised him.”<sup>47</sup>

The work Jordan and Warren did together over the years had a few lumps as well as their many notable victories. There are two contrasting cases very close together in time which give revealing glimpses of their work. On October 28, 1943, Arthur M. Florence was shot after he was robbed. Jordan and Warren were off duty at the time, but were called at their homes and immediately came to the scene. They had been looking for David Lee Saffold, 14 years of age, for other recent burglaries. They soon found and arrested Saffold. He readily admitted two other

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<sup>47</sup> Undated Orchid Jordan interview, Black Archives of Mid-America; F. S. Smith to Chief L. B. Reed, Nov. 16, 1940; Theodore Puge to Chief L. B. Reed, Sept. 27, 1940; Memo from Chief L. B. Reed, May 12, 1941; Thomas A. Webster, to Sergeant Dobbs, July 18, 1941; Harold Anderson to Thomas Webster, Aug. 27, 1941, KCPD Police File, LJC; *Call*, July 3, 17, 24, 31, 1942; Thomas A. Webster Address at 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine Streets Heritage observance, July 5, 1984, Black Archives.

burglaries and named Warnell Calvin Bruce as an accomplice, but he denied any knowledge of the robbery and shooting of Florence.

A warrant was issued for Bruce's arrest. Meanwhile the police received a tip that they might find something that would assist in the Florence murder at 13<sup>th</sup> and Euclid. An officer went there and returned with a man's leather jacket. After Bruce was arrested he was asked if he recognized the jacket. He identified it as belonging to Saffold. Jordan and Warren took the jacket to other friends of Saffold who confirmed the jacket belonged to Saffold. Saffold was then brought into police custody from the Parental Home where he had been detained and questioned by Jordan and Warren. Within an hour he admitted the crime and then led them to where he had thrown the murder weapon away. It was found. A complete and conclusive statement was then taken.

Chief of Detectives, E. L. Kellerstrass then wrote to Chief of Police, Richard R. Foster: "This is not the first time these two detectives' work has been outstanding. On one occasion, July 13, 1942, they were both cited before the Board of Police Commissioners for their efficiency in the solving of a murder committed in Johnson County, Kansas, which occurred July 4, 1942. I have several other letters in their personnel file commending their good work. Therefore, I heartily recommend these officers receive a letter of commendation from you personally, as well as from the Board of Police Commissioners; also an increase in salary."

Kellerstrass made his recommendation on Nov. 2, and on Nov. 19 Jordan and Warren were given letters of commendation and a \$10 raise per month. That same day their letters of commendation and raises were rescinded because of an investigation into another incident that began Oct. 23, just a few days prior to Florence's murder.

Patrolman Emmett Walls, who lived in a flat at 2818 Highland, a floor below Cliff Warren and his family, ran into a young man, Louis Buggs, whom Walls had known while he was a coach at Bubbles Klyce's Gateway Club. According to Walls's statement, Buggs hailed Walls and regretted he hadn't seen Walls sooner, for he had just pawned a ring that he would rather have left with Walls for the same amount of money. After some conversation Walls agreed to help the young man by having him redeem the pawned ring, then giving him some money while Walls held the ring. Buggs introduced Walls to James Riley Barber, with whom he had come to Kansas City from Topeka. About the same time Walls spotted Detectives Jordan and Warren driving by and hailed them requesting a ride to the pawn shop where Buggs had pawned the ring.

Jordan and Warren readily agreed. Barber looked familiar to Jordan. He thought he knew his father from the days Jordan was in charge of a playground in Topeka. When Jordan named the man, the young men knew the family, but they were not related. However, Jordan and the young men quickly recognized that they knew others in common and Jordan gave the boys his card, identifying his present position in the Kansas City Police Department. Walls and Buggs redeemed the ring from the pawnbroker. Jordan looked at the redeemed ring and agreed it must be worth the money Walls was giving the young man to hold even though he considered it of no special value.

According to the statements of the police officers, the boys were then left and the officers returned to their regular duties. But that was not the story told by Buggs and Barber. The latter were arrested a few days later for a jewelry robbery in Topeka, which they readily confessed to. They told of then driving with two other young men to Kansas City on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and meeting Walls. But they accused Walls of shaking them down for some of the stolen jewelry. They

agreed Warren and Jordan did not witness the shake down. But they said the officers took them to police headquarters and threatened them with arrest before finally deciding to be lenient and telling them to get out of town. Buggs and Barber, however, had returned to Topeka with a great deal of jewelry that they had hidden on their persons. Their inability to explain how or why they were able to retain so much jewelry after Walls had shaken them down damaged the credibility of their story.

Jordan insisted he had known Walls all his life and couldn't believe that he had any suspicion the ring he redeemed from the pawn shop was stolen. Jordan's loyalty to his friend may have been stronger than his better judgment. But that was not cited in his reprimand. He was cited for conduct unbecoming an officer in that "you did at request of Officer Emmett Walls. . .use police equipment for personal and private business." The pay increase and commendation that had been recommended for both Warren and Jordan in the Florence murder case were then cancelled.

Nevertheless, Thomas Webster wrote to Chief Richard B. Foster on Nov. 1, 1943: "I have had occasion several times to send to your predecessors letters praising the performance by Detective Leon Jordan and Detective Clifford Warren. Again during this past week these two detectives, with hardly any clues, were able to quickly solve a crime which might have engendered considerable feeling in the community if it had not been solved quickly. The manner in which these detectives have performed their services, confirmed long standing opinion and belief that Negro policemen are qualified and competent to handle most of the problems, particularly racial involvements, in the Negro community.

"They can elicit both respect of their fellow officers, as well as respect on the part of the citizens of the community in the enforcement of the law. Many metropolitan communities have seen fit

to elevate Negro policemen to positions of commanding officers. Again, as I have expressed to your predecessors, I believe either of these two men are qualified to act as commanding officers of Flora Avenue Station and that such consideration should be given to Negro policemen who can perform in such a fashion as the two above mentioned have rendered service.”<sup>48</sup>

Late in 1945 Jordan and Warren broke another case that the community enjoyed reading about. For many months there were a string of robberies in the Coleman Heights area that went unsolved. Then a stolen watch was pawned and identified. White detectives arrested Winfred Mitchell and accused him of the robberies. But he indignantly protested his innocence, insisting he had pawned the watch for his brother, Edward. After considerable questioning Jordan and Warren were brought in on the case. Learning that Edward had served time for burglary, they quickly shifted their suspicions. Edward then tried to give them another suspect, Yancey Allen, by telling them all the fine points that Allen had taught him about burglary. Despite the fact that Edward indicated Allen could not be found, they located Allen and brought him in to confront his accuser.

Allen was indignant that Edward had tried to finger him. Edward quickly confessed to being the Barefoot Bandit. Jordan and Warden took Edward on a tour of the neighborhood, and Edward soon warmed up to give them a detailed commentary on the 26 homes he had robbed, even though only 21 had been reported, in some instances pointing to the garage roofs where emptied wallets could still be found. He had robbed for the fun of it. He spent the cash he stole quickly to have a good time. But it was his method that was intriguing. Once the robberies

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<sup>48</sup> Interdepartment communication, Oct. 23, 1943, fr Lt. Rex L. Witka to Chief of Detectives, E. L. Kellerstrass; letter fr. Kellerstrass to Chief Richard B. Foster, Nov. 2, 1943; Statements recorded Nov. 4, 1943, from Lewis C. Bugs, James R. Barber, Joseph Krashin, Manford Rogers, George Nowak, Ray B. Minnick, Robert L. Jones, William Kenner, Dominic S. DeFeo, and George Mall; and on Nov. 5 from Leon Jordan, Emmett Harold Walls, and Clifford Warren; Investigative report, Nov. 13, 1943, from E. L. Willoughby to Chief Kellerstrass; letter from Thomas Webster to Chief Foster, Nov. 1, 1943; all from KCPD file, LJC.

became known people in the neighborhood began carefully to keep their homes well lighted, but this proved a mistake. The Barefoot Bandit targeted only well lighted homes where he could see the people inside. He made sure which rooms they were in before he slipped quietly into other parts of their homes and made off quickly with what jewelry and valuables he could obtain. The neighborhood was happy the bandit was caught and that the genial, but persistent questioning of the detectives had given them a story that would be told and retold for some time.

Albert Reddick was one of many police recruits trained by Leon Jordan. Jordan later invited Reddick to accompany him to Liberia to help train the Monrovia police force. Reddick told a story about a Jordan who was not always so congenial. He remembered sitting in a liquor store, one of Leon's favorite spots, when a man came in, bought a bottle and left rather hurriedly. Leon asked if Reddick noticed anything peculiar. He had only noted the man's haste. Leon then told him the man was carrying a gun and ordered him to take the guy and get the gun. He told Reddick he would back him up. Reddick went after the guy and as he caught up with him held his police badge in his left hand while holding his drawn gun with the other. He shoved the badge in the man's face and arrested him without serious problem. But after the arrest Leon took him to a nearby field where they could be alone and gave him hell for having one hand occupied with his badge. That was dangerous. Keep both hands free when confronting an armed man. Identify yourself as a policeman with words, *but keep both hands free*. Nevermind doing it like the movies. Your own life is too important. He told him he would personally shoot him if he ever saw him do that again. Leon was about twenty years older than Reddick.

While the detective work of Jordan and Warren drew much praise and was celebrated in the black press, it is clear they had to work within an environment severely restricted by racial segregation. A black officer could not arrest a white citizen. He had to refer the matter to a



white officer. Both Jordan and Warren were designated to work with black youth. Their work with young people was constructive and they clearly learned from it. But it was also a way of racially pigeon holing their activities. When Tom Webster recommended that both officers were capable of greater administrative authority, he suggested that either was qualified to head the Flora station, a station whose work was largely confined to the black community. He was deliberately challenging the assumption that black policemen had to be supervised by white officers.<sup>49</sup>

In early 1947, as Jordan's actual police work in Kansas City was coming to a close, his marriage also was in trouble. On January 14<sup>th</sup> he named his aunt Josephine Wright beneficiary for his retirement package. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, Leon Jordan, plaintiff, was granted a divorce from Orchid Jordan for "allegations not specified in the record." Since the Jordans were quietly remarried June 5, their divorce and remarriage was known only to a few who were then close friends.

Jackie Rhodes remembers an incident that seems likely to have been the particular trigger for the divorce. Orchid had a friend in Denver, John Kigh, from an old and respected family. During one of their visits there, Leon overheard a telephone conversation between Kigh and Orchid and became furiously angry. He apparently held a deeply ingrained double standard of sexual behavior. He literally beat up Orchid. Alene Walker also remembered that the Jordans had divorced and that Leon had beaten Orchid. Neither Rhodes nor Walker were very clear on dates, but the divorce is a matter of public record.

It was during this brief period of divorce that Leon was contacted by Malcolm B. Magers of Plattwood, Missouri, at the request of Col. John B. West of the U. S. Public Health Mission in

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<sup>49</sup> *Kansas City Call*, Nov. 30, 1945; *Kansas City Star*, Nov. 26, 1945; Phone interview with Albert Reddick, Sept. 24, 2004.

Liberia. Jordan told the *Star* that he had met West at Howard University when he was in law school and West in medical school. He added that Mrs. West was a native of Kansas City. This only hints at the significance of Mrs. West's relation to the Jordans. As noted earlier, Col. John West married Muriel Stewart, the daughter of Mayme [or Mamie] Jones Stewart, who in turn was the close friend of Leon's mother, Lena Rivers, and his aunt Sallie Jordan in the 1890's. All three were founding members of the Inter-City Dames. Orchid Jordan later became a member. Muriel Stewart West probably did as well. It seems likely that West, prior to her husband's choice of Jordan for the Liberian position, had a more significant relation to the Jordans than her husband did. In addition John West's brother, Dr. Charles West did his internship at Kansas City's General Hospital, so West had many ties to Kansas City and Leon was probably much better known to him than Jordan's public comments indicate.

Jordan negotiated with West a two year contract to reorganize and train Liberia's police force. The contract was signed and dated June 3, two days before Leon and Orchid quietly remarried in Olathe with Orchid's brother, Ramsey, as witness. Leon's contract indicated he was to begin work in Liberia, January 1, 1948. In addition to salary he was offered passage to Liberia for both him and his wife, free living quarters and medical service. The Liberian contract apparently offered not only a new career opportunity, but an opportunity to restore the marriage between Leon and Orchid. Leon's physical abuse of Orchid seems to have been an impulsive uncharacteristic event. After returning to Kansas City from Liberia, Leon resumed his early philandering, but consistently managed to remain on friendly terms with the women in his life as well as his wife even after his various romantic relations were ended. There seems to have been no other instance of physical abuse.

On May 7, 1947, Jordan requested two years leave of absence. In his request he expressed some urgency because the Liberian Centennial celebration was to be held July 26, and it had been suggested that he fly to Liberia as soon as possible. Apparently this was before his final contract indicating a January 1 start was worked out. Chief J. W. Johnson made a recommendation to the board on May 2, even before Jordan's written request, that Jordan be granted leave. In his report to the board he also indicated that Detective Jordan had been selected from a group of six officers throughout the country who had applied for this position.

On August 29 Jordan was named an Acting Sergeant, effective September 1, 1947, and advised to take the next Sergeant's examination. He was to be promoted to Detective Sergeant upon completing that exam with a satisfactory grade. The Board of Police Commissioners granted Jordan one year's leave, the maximum by rule at the time, beginning December 15, 1947. There seemed to be both an implicit understanding that his leave could be extended, but that he would at some future time return to the department..

Late in November the local NAACP sponsored a going-away party for the Jordans at the Street Hotel. More than a hundred people, including many public officials, attended. The *Call* described it as "a farewell tribute to a well known and well liked police officer." But, "It accomplished more than that. It offered a rare occasion for an evaluation of the merits of the present police administration, a review of the mistakes of the past administrations, and an opportunity to offer suggestions for the improvement of future administrations.

"It was also a graphic demonstration, unparalleled in the history of Kansas City, of friendly relations between police officers and members of a minority group.

"That a testimonial to Leon Jordan should embrace all these aspects was not out of harmony with the intended purpose of the affair. The honoree himself had become symbolic of the transition of

the police force from a mere ‘political football’ to one of the most modern and efficient departments in the country.”

Chief Johnson “credited Jordan with much of the improvement in race-relations and recounted the story of Jordan’s development as a police detective.” Leon was presented with a pen and pencil set and Orchid fittingly presented with an orchid. Three of Leon’s aunts were present, Mrs. John Wright, Mrs. Callie Edwards, and Mrs. Sallie Love. The previous night the Jordans were given a party by their fellow police officers at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Allen. Mrs. Allen was a policewoman. The Jordans were given a pair of binoculars as a gift.<sup>50</sup>

This was a significant and adventuresome moment in Leon Jordan’s career as a policeman. Neither he nor the police department knew what this venture portended for his career, but it is clear that at this point he started with both hearty good will and healthy cooperation and support from the department. The black community of Kansas City was proud of his achievements and looking forward to hearing more of his adventures in distant Liberia. He was walking the walk of his father and grandfather, but with his own distinctive gait.

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<sup>50</sup> Divorce and marriage records, LJC; Interview with Jackie Rhodes, March 3, 2007; interview with Alene Walker, Sept. 15, 2004; KCPD file, LJC; *Your Kansas City and Mine*, p. 90; clipping from the *Kansas City Star*, circa June, 1947, LJC; *Kansas City Call*, July 20, 1947 and Nov. 28, 1947.