

[Home](#) > [Blog](#) > From Levi Jordan to the Capitol: Jesse James Mack Grew Up at the Old Plantation, Ascended to Position as Elite Texas Ranger

From Levi Jordan to the Capitol: Jesse James Mack Grew Up at the Old Plantation, Ascended to Position as Elite Texas Ranger

Submitted by Justin Minsker on Wed, 03/08/2023 - 1:30pm

Categories: [THC's Historic Sites](#), [Levi Jordan Plantation State Historic Site](#)

Jesse James Mack was born to York and Ola Jammer Mack on June 3, 1950 in Matagorda County. At the time of his birth, Jesse's parents were living on the grounds of the Levi Jordan Plantation. York Mack worked as a ranch foreman for Harry Martin, a descendant of Levi Jordan.

Jesse's father died suddenly, shortly after Jesse was born, and his mother Ola moved off of the plantation not long after to continue taking care of the Martin family, who was living in the small town of Brazoria. Jesse and his grandfather, Malachi Jammer, had a close relationship while he was growing up, as documented in an interview by Antony Cheria in 2005 at Jesse's home in Houston.

"I was close to my grandparents. My grandfather, especially, because pretty much—without a father figure, he was always there for me and I was doing things for him. Watching him, doing whatever he needed to do. You know, if he was working out in the field, then I was working out in the fields with him. If he was taking care of the animals, then I was taking care of the animals also. So I pretty much stayed close to him working."

It was Jesse's grandfather that taught him the work ethic he would carry with him throughout his life. When asked what kind of lessons his grandfather taught him, Jesse replied,

"Well, things like you need to work hard. You know, go out and work. Don't just sit up around the house. And I guess in today's terms, it would just be, do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. You get out there and you make an honest day's—you do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay."

In May of 1968 Jesse graduated from Sweeny High School, and shortly after, in December of that year, enlisted in the U.S. Air Force to support the Vietnam War effort. He describes that his mother and her wish for Jesse to receive a higher education was a driving factor behind his decision to enlist.

"But I knew we did not have a lot of money. So reading some of the material that the military had to offer, and one of them was that they had just recently passed what they call the G.I. Bill which the military would pay for your college education if you needed to. And then the thought that one night I was just sitting there and they showed some pictures of some air—I think it was the Thunderbirds flying in the air. And man, I thought that was impressive. And I thought, 'Man, that looks pretty good. I think that's what I want to do.' And sure, that's what I did. I joined the Air Force."

For a little over four years, Jesse worked as an aerospace aircraft mechanical accessories and equipment repairman technician specialist for the Air Force, or more simply, a jet mechanic. During his time in the military, Jesse took up basketball and was so good he was selected to attend St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, on a scholarship to play once his time with the Air Force was complete. While attending St. Edward's in 1972, Jesse got married and welcomed his first child. He describes the difficulties of balancing work, a new family, basketball, and maintaining his scholarship.

Share

Subscribe

[Subscribe to the Real Places, Real Stories blog by email](#)

Categories

- [Archeology](#)
- [Architecture](#)
- [Community Development](#)
- [Friends of the THC](#)
- [Heritage Travel](#)
- [History Programs](#)
- [Preservation Profiles](#)
- [THC's Historic Sites](#)
- [The Medallion](#)

Recent blog posts

- [The Canner Can Can: The Rayburns and Food Preservation](#)
- [From Levi Jordan to the Capitol: Jesse James Mack Grew Up at the Old Plantation, Ascended to Position as Elite Texas Ranger](#)
- [A Bit of the East in East Texas: Japanese Artifacts in the Rayburn House](#)
- [Joel A. Rogers and the Legacy of the Five Black Presidents?](#)
- [Storm-Tossed Ships: Lake Austin and Her 'Sister' Ship Lydia Ann](#)
- [Sam Rayburn and the Ten Little Bluebirds](#)

"Things, going to school, was pretty tough. Like I said, I was married, had a child. And you had to go to school, you had to work and take classes and stuff. So it was pretty tough."

Jesse stayed at St. Edward's on scholarship for 2 and a half years before he was approached by a friend of his to join the Department of Public Safety.

"I had a friend of mine that was in DPS at the time, was on highway patrol. And he said, 'Man, why don't you just come on, join the DPS, get you a job? That way you can at least have some money coming in every month.' At first, I was kind of laughing, and said, 'No man, I'm too busy running from you guys. Let alone trying to join 'em.' He said, 'Naw, it's not all that bad, man. You're pretty well-known in town, and your reputation's always been good.' And so—and I said, 'Well, okay, I'll think about it.' You figure, you've got a married life, you're going to school, you're playing basketball and you're working. You've got all those four elements and you're trying to—you're just trying to make it, and after a while. You know, some of those things, they just start coming together. And you have to make a decision whether or not you're going to keep going like that or change and do something else. And I chose to change and do something else, which was joining the Department of Public Safety."

At the time of his training, Jesse states that there were roughly 1,500 commissioned officers with DPS, and only five of those officers were black. As a result of an affirmative action push, Jesse was part of a graduating class of about 30 African Americans. Jesse describes this climb through the ranks:

"And then my career started off in '75 and I progressed through the ranks and became an investigator in 1988, and was promoted out of uniformed service, into plainclothes service. And then in 1994, I got promoted to the Texas Rangers, which, at that time only had three Blacks in the 170-year history of the Texas Rangers."

Jesse's acceptance into the Texas Rangers was no small feat as he states,

"You have to be tested. You have to take a promotional test and after you take the promotional test, then the department will take the top 10 percent out of the persons that scored. Usually it's about 20-25 people. Then you go before Austin, before an oral interview board, and then after that, if they need one person, then they'll choose that one person and put four or five on the eligibility list. If they need four persons, they'll choose four persons and put four or five on the eligibility list. However many they need, sometimes they don't have any vacancies. You know Rangers just don't go and come that easily. Once you're there, you pretty much stay there for a long time."

As a Texas Ranger, Jesse was responsible for assisting local law enforcement and the district attorney in investigations carried out in Grimes, Washington, and Waller counties. In his earlier days in law enforcement, Jesse describes some of the racist comments and situations he dealt with:

"This was in the—I'd say the '80s men were—we went to a function one time and then, it was a county function. And the guy said 'You guys come on in but y'all got to', course they used the n word during that time, 'We don't allow them in here.'

He later states on the same topic:

"That's part of that, what Blacks and whites had to overcome in America. And we have overcome some of that. But then again that was the early part of my career. And me personally? I had a little problem, but I was always a guy that had the gift of gab, and I got along with everybody. And I didn't have any problems with a lot of racism. I had just very little. I remember one time, we—and this was in the '80s—we had a commander. I was standing there, along with four other white officers. And then the commander came and shook all the white officers' hands and said, "I don't shake your people's hand." And he just turned around and walked off. So what do you do? He's your commander. You just go on about your business. And try not to let it bother you. Just do the job that you are sworn to do. So those things you have to overcome. And you're, I mean you get pretty upset, sometimes enough to make you want to quit. But you know, quitting was just never in my mind. And like I say, my grandfather taught me that. He said, "Man, you just don't quit. You hang in there."

Jesse didn't quit; in fact, Jesse's good reputation as a Texas Ranger grew and soon he was appointed to detail high-ranking Texas politicians such as former Lieutenant Governor of Texas, Bob Bullock. When Jesse was asked to elaborate on this relationship he stated:

"He was a powerful man. And of course, I got to know him very well. For some reason, I guess he just liked me. And he and I became good friends and I used to go visit him all the time in Austin. And there were several times

- [We Can Dig It: Archeology at the Rayburn House](#)
- [Free Veterans Day commemoration livestream - Nov. 11](#)
- [Tour of Oakwood Cemetary](#)
- [Holiday Gift Guide 2022](#)

SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES »

Texas Heritage Travel Guide



Start your next adventure with the THC's new statewide travel guide, which highlights historic

destinations in all 10 Texas Heritage Trail regions. [Download](#) a free copy today!

Instagram

Follow [@txhistcomm](#)



Twitter

that he would—I would go in there when he was having the legislature, he would stop the meetings and stuff, whatever. And he'd call me up there and I'd just come up there with him and he'd hug me right up there.”

Jesse would go on to be the lead pallbearer at Bullock’s funeral per the request of Bob Bullock and his wife.

Jesse Mack joined the DPS in 1975 and served as a Texas Ranger from 1994–2000. His earliest years were spent being raised on the Levi Jordan Plantation. In order to further his education and provide for his family, Jesse joined the Air Force, then later attended St. Edward’s University on a basketball scholarship before he joined the DPS and eventually rose to the rank of Texas Ranger; the third black Texas Ranger in its history. Jesse Mack’s story is one of perseverance as he kept his nose to the grindstone and continued not to give up on his goals just as his grandfather had instructed.

If you like this post, please subscribe to our blog via [RSS](#) or [email](#).

Weight:
0

Photo Gallery

Click on any image to view the photo gallery.

[Share](#) |



Jesse Mack Photo by Department of Public Safety

Tweets from @TxHis

[Texas Historical Com](#)

Jamie Crawley @fz

“Duke’s advice to o
placekeeping and p
active with the TX M
change happen.” ~I
(Seguin) in @TXArc
@TxHistComm

magazine.texasar
A Tale of Two Tex
Magazine

3

[Texas Historical Com](#)

[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Preserve](#) | [Project Review](#) | [News & Events](#) | [Education](#) | [Historic Sites](#) | [Explore Texas](#)
[Donate](#) | [Statewide Preservation Plan](#) | [Historic Sites Atlas](#) | [Contact Us](#)

[Site Map](#) | [Desktop View](#) | [Report A Website Problem](#)

© 2023 Texas Historical Commission. | [Policies](#) | [Texas.gov](#) | [TRAIL Search](#) | [Texas Veterans Portal](#)

Site by: [Mighty Citizen](#)



Updated: 2023-03-08 13:33