

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with John W. Mack

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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>	Mack, John W., 1937-2018
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 15, 2007 and November 18, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007 and 2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:30:32).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civic leader, nonprofit chief executive, and city government appointee John W. Mack (1937 - 2018 ) was a former president of the Los Angeles Urban League; co-founder of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights; co-founder of the Los Angeles Black Leadership Coalition on Education; and an executive member of the Board of Police Commissioners of the Los Angeles Police Department. Mack was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 15, 2007 and November 18, 2013, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_139
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civic leader John Wesley Mack was born on January 6, 1937, in Kingtree, South Carolina, to Abram Mack, a Methodist minister, and Ruth Wynita, a school teacher. Shortly after he was born, Mack's family moved to Darlington, South Carolina. Mack attended North Carolina A&T State University, where he earned his B.S. degree in applied sociology in 1958. As a student, Mack was the head of the college's NAACP student chapter. The following year, Mack was married to Harriett Johnson, an elementary school teacher he met through his college roommate; the couple went on to have three children together.

In 1960, Mack co-founded and became vice-chairman of the Commission on Appeal for Human Rights, an organization that incorporated members of Atlanta University, Morehouse, and Spelman Colleges, including such noted figures as Marion Wright Edelman, Julian Bond, and Reverend Otis Marsh. That same year, the students held sit-ins at Rich's Department Store. During this time, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested. 1960 was also the year that Mack obtained his M.A. degree in social work from Clark Atlanta University.

Shortly afterward, Mack and his family moved to Oxnard, California, as part of a social work fellowship established for him at Camarillo Hospital by his mentor Whitney Young. In 1964, upon completing his work at the Camarillo Hospital, Mack moved to Flint, Michigan, where a year later he became Executive Director of the Flint Urban League. It was in Flint that Mack focused on fair housing and voter registration issues.

In 1969, Mack became President of the Los Angeles Urban League, where he would serve until his retirement in 2005; the longest tenure of anyone in this position. With Mack as president, the Los Angeles Urban League became one of the country's most successful non-profit organizations, generating an annual budget of \$25 million while promoting issues of employment, education and economic development.

In 1977, Mack became co-founder and co-chair of the Los Angeles Black Leadership Coalition on Education, and in the early 1980s, he was appointed vice president of the United Way Corporation of Council Executives. In the late 1990s, Mack served as a Fellow in Residence at Harvard University, where he led a study group entitled “The Future of Urban America: Finding Solutions Through Strategic Partnership and Policy Advocacy.” In 2005, Mack was appointed President of the Board of Police Commissioners of the Los Angeles Police Department by Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa; he held this position for two consecutive years before being elected to the office of Vice President in 2007. Over the years Mack has been awarded by numerous different institutions, including Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Black Women of Achievement, Operation Hope, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the California Afro American Museum.

Mack passed away on June 21, 2018.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with John W. Mack was conducted by Larry Crowe and Paul Brock on April 15, 2007 and November 18, 2013, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civic leader, nonprofit chief executive, and city government appointee John W. Mack (1937 - 2018 ) was a former president of the Los Angeles Urban League; co-founder of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights; co-founder of the Los Angeles Black Leadership Coalition on Education; and an executive member of the Board of Police Commissioners of the Los Angeles Police Department.

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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:

Mack, John W., 1937-2018

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Mack, John W., 1937-2018 --Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews

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Police administration--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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Los Angeles Urban League.

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**Occupations:**

Civic Leader

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City Government Appointee

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Nonprofit Chief Executive

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

CivicMakers

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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 John W. Mack, April 15, 2007 and November 18, 2013. 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 John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:22 ?

John W. Mack was born on January 6, 1937 in Kingstree, South Carolina to Ruth Alford Mack and Abraham Mack. Mack's mother was born in 1907 in Clio, South Carolina to Thomas Alford and Fannie Alford, where she and her eight siblings were raised on a farm. Mack's father was also from South Carolina, and later became a Methodist minister there, while Mack's mother worked as a teacher. Soon after Mack's birth, the family moved to his maternal family's farm. When his father was hired at St. James United Methodist Church in Darlington, South Carolina, they moved to the parsonage there. Even though the city was segregated, many of Mack's playmates were white. Later, his father pastored a rural church, and the family, which included Mack's older brother Thomas Mack and younger sister Ruth Mack Gray, moved to the black section of Darlington. There, Mack befriended Carolyn Allston-Wright Lewis, who was the granddaughter of his third grade teacher, Constance Allston, and later married entrepreneur Edward Lewis.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Nonprofit organizations--Employees--United States--Interviews.

Police administration--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:05 ?

John W. Mack grew up in Darlington, South Carolina, where his mother, Ruth Alford Mack, opened a small store next to their home. The family lived near the local black funeral home and the city's only African American doctor. In the summers, Mack and his older brother, Thomas Mack, picked cotton, and attended the annual Buddy Johnson concerts. When Mack was a teenager, a group of armed African Americans in his community drove away Ku Klux Klansmen who threatened the town. Upon graduating from Darlington's Mayo High School in 1954, Mack was inspired by his brother and family friend, dentist William Gibson, to attend Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina in Greensboro, North Carolina. There, Mack studied sociology and led protests against segregation on campus. He eventually became a founding

member of the campus' NAACP youth group. During his senior year, Mack met civil rights leader Whitney Young, who urged him to enroll at the Atlanta University School of Social Work in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_001\_003, TRT: 0:27:53 ?

John W. Mack's father, Abraham Mack, died while he was student at Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina in Greensboro, North Carolina. Mack was moved by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech at the nearby Bennett College. Upon graduating in 1958, Mack secured a scholarship to attend Atlanta University School of Social Work in Atlanta, Georgia with the help of the school's founder, Whitney Young. There, Mack continued his civil rights activism, and was involved with the founding of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights. The group was led by Lonnie C. King, Jr., and included Julian Bond, Marian Wright Edelman and Reverend Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. The students received support from Ralph McGill at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution but encountered resistance from Atlanta Daily World publisher C.A. Scott. During that time, the Atlanta Inquirer emerged from the student movement. They received nonviolent tactical training from Reverend King; and protested stores that refused to hire African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

John W. Mack met his future wife, Harriett Hicks Johnson Mack, through her twin brother, Henry Johnson, who was his roommate at Atlanta University School of Social Work. They married in 1959. While in graduate school, Mack was active in the Atlanta Student Movement and took part in a protest against Rich's Department Store, who eventually changed their discriminatory practices. In spring of 1960, the students planned a protest against local, state and federal institutions. While Mack led a demonstration at a federal building, Lonnie C. King and Johnny E. Parham, Jr. led protests at Fulton County Courthouse and the Georgia State Capitol. Real estate businessman Q.V. Williamson provided bail money for students who were arrested, although Mack was spared due to a mistake on his arrest warrant. Mack, Parham, King and Julian Bond went on to share their experiences at a U.S. National Student Association conference in Washington, D.C. and Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

John W. Mack was invited to speak about the Atlanta Student Movement at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Even though the movement had gained national attention, the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights received mixed support from local churches. Nevertheless, the NAACP, led nationally by Roy Wilkins, offered financial and organizational support as did James Farmer, leader of CORE, who worked closely with the group. During his last year in graduate school, Mack was invited to join the National Urban League by Whitney Young, who was its newly elected national director, but decided to begin his career in social work instead. Upon graduating from the Atlanta University School of Social Work in 1960, Mack was hired by the State of California. That year, the Democratic National Convention was held in Los Angeles, California, and the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights selected Mack as their representative to present their concerns to the Democratic Party platform committee.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_002\_006, TRT: 6:28:47 ?

John W. Mack graduated in 1960 from the Atlanta University School of Social Work in Atlanta, Georgia, and went to work for the Camarillo State Mental Hospital in Camarillo, California, where he remained for three years. Mack often met with his mentor and National Urban League president, Whitney Young; and

was hired as director of housing, health and welfare for the Urban League of Flint in Michigan. There, he worked with Governor George W. Romney to pass a fair housing law to combat housing discrimination. After the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mack worked with other organizations to minimize looting during the ensuing riots. Soon after, Mack returned to California, and succeeded Frank L. Stanley, Jr. as president of the Los Angeles Urban League, where he fought for school desegregation through busing. He also joined the Black Leadership Coalition on Education, which was comprised of members from the Los Angeles Urban League, NAACP, and SCLC.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_002\_007, TRT: 7:31:35 ?

John W. Mack was president of the Los Angeles Urban League, and focused on problems within the Los Angeles Police Department. Mack protested against the use of police chokehold maneuvers, which caused the death of twenty-one African American men. In 1991, Mack was alerted by journalist Larry McCormick to the release of the video of Rodney King's beating, and he led the Los Angeles Urban League with activists like Danny Bakewell, Sr. and Johnnie Cochran to mount a campaign against police chief, Daryl Gates, which led to his dismissal. Afterward, the Christopher Commission was formed, and a review system was established to reduce the power of the police chief. Mack worked closely with police chief Bernard Parks, who was appointed by then-mayor Richard Riordan. Mack retired from the Los Angeles Urban League in June 2005; and later that year, was appointed by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa as head of the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_002\_008, TRT: 8:27:28 ?

John W. Mack was president of the Los Angeles Urban League in California when Whitney Young died in 1971. Two years later, they established the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Dinner to honor his legacy. At this point in the interview, Mack talks about the Rampart scandal in 1997, which uncovered police misconduct under police chief Bernard Parks. Later, Mack and other political leaders, including Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Maxine Waters, Danny Bakewell, Sr., and Reverend Cecil L. "Chip" Murray, supported Parks' attempts to recondition the Los Angeles Police Department, but his contract was not renewed by the incoming mayor, James Hahn. As a result, the group endorsed Antonio Villaraigosa for mayor the next election. Under Mack's leadership, the Los Angeles Urban League created an automotive training center in Los Angeles' Crenshaw neighborhood, and worked with the Milken Family Literacy and Youth Training Center. Mack talks about his philosophy of activism, and the legacy of Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_002\_009, TRT: 9:29:40 ?

John W. Mack worked to eliminate racism in Los Angeles, California and often debated with police chief Daryl Gates over racist practices in the Los Angeles Police Department. Mack, Reverend Cecil L. "Chip" Murray and Danny Bakewell, Sr. formed a community advisory committee to address their concerns with Gates, who ignored them. The group disbanded, and soon after, police officers questioned Mack about his personal donation to Tom Bradley's mayoral campaign, hoping to find that he had used funds from the Los Angeles Urban League. During that time, Mack was also threatened by local skinheads who planned to plant a bomb at Reverend Murray's church, First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. Even though they were unsuccessful, Mack was given police protection. In 1991, Mack and other local leaders met with District Attorney Gil Garcetti about the O.J. Simpson trial. Mack talks about the work of attorney Johnnie Cochran, and describes his hopes and concerns for the

African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with John W. Mack, Section A2007\_139\_002\_010, TRT: 10:10:11 ?

John W. Mack mentored the younger members of the Los Angeles Urban League through the Young Professionals program, which was established by National Urban League President Hugh Price. A few of his mentees, including Nolan V. Rollins and Kevin E. Hooks, went on to lead city chapters of the organization. Mack reflects upon his life and career. He also talks about his family, and concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.