

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis

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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>	Ellis, C. Jack, 1946-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 22, 2011
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2011
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:32:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mayor The Honorable C. Jack Ellis (1946 - ) was elected the 40th Mayor of Macon, Georgia, becoming the first African American mayor in the City's 176-year history. Ellis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 22, 2011, in Macon, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2011_027
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Mayor C. Jack Ellis was born on January 6, 1946 in Macon, Georgia to William Claude Ellis and Willie Mae Glover. Ellis was one of thirteen children. Ellis attended public schools in Macon, Georgia and earned his B.A. degree at St. Leo College in St. Leo, Florida.

Ellis enlisted in the U.S. Army, where he served as a combat soldier and paratrooper in Vietnam in the 101st Airborne Division. He was awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge, three Bronze Stars, the Army Commendation Medal for Heroism and the Purple Heart for wounds received in combat. Ellis worked with Reverend Jesse Jackson's second presidential campaign in 1988, and then went to work for the Census Bureau in from 1988 to January of 1991, and managed a cable television system on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. He also hosted a public access television show focusing on public and political affairs. In 1988, Ellis helped to manage Reverend Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign for the State of Georgia.

In 1999, Ellis was elected the 40th mayor of Macon, Georgia, becoming the first African American Mayor in the City's 176-year history. He was then re-elected In 2003. During his tenure as Mayor, Ellis's administration was responsible for approximately \$1 million in loans to disadvantaged businesses. Under Ellis's leadership, the City successfully won a federal Hope VI grant to improve public housing, in addition to other grants and federal aid. His administration constructed over 300 new affordable housing units and eliminated over 2000 sub-standard houses. Also, during Ellis's administration, the City of Macon was designated as a city of excellence by the Georgia Municipal Association and awarded the City Livability Award by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. First Lady Laura Bush designated Macon as a "Preserve American Community." Ellis also created the C. Jack Ellis Youth Foundation which assisted underprivileged and special needs children in America, the Caribbean and Africa. After Ellis left office in 2007, he was appointed honorary consul for Uganda to promote the country in the southeastern United States. Three years later, Ellis announced that he would seek a third term as Mayor of Macon. In 2011, Ellis officially began his mayoral campaign.

Ellis has received many distinctions and honors, including being named one of the top leaders in the State of Georgia. As Mayor, Ellis served as vice president for the World Conference of Mayors for Tourism and Investment and chairman of the International Affairs Committee for the National Conference of Black Mayors. Ellis is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, the NAACP and a 32nd degree Mason and a Shriner. His is the father of five children, and lives in Atlanta Georgia.

Clarence Jack Ellis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 22, 2011.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis was conducted by Denise Gines on April 22, 2011, in Macon, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Mayor The Honorable C. Jack Ellis (1946 - ) was elected the 40th Mayor of Macon, Georgia, becoming the first African American mayor in the City's 176-year history.

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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:

Ellis, C. Jack, 1946-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ellis, C. Jack, 1946- --Interviews

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African American Politicians--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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## 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 C. Jack Ellis, April 22, 2011. 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 C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_001,  
TRT: 1:28:45 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis was born on January 6, 1946 in Macon, Georgia to Willie Glover Ellis and William Ellis. His paternal grandmother, Emily Cloud Ellis, was the biracial daughter of a white landowner. In 1901, she married Arthur Ellis, an educated sharecropper, with whom she raised five children, including Ellis' father. He was orphaned at twelve years old, and left school to care for his younger siblings. As an adult, Ellis' father worked as a farmhand in Jeffersonville, Georgia, where he met Ellis' mother, whose father owned the farm. Ellis' mother was educated through the sixth grade, was an avid reader and was deeply committed to Christianity. Ellis' father was entrepreneurial; and, after working for a time at the Robins Air Force Base, purchased his own farm, where Ellis and his twelve siblings grew up. They helped their father harvest crops to sell at the market, and his father also made moonshine to support the family, for which he once spent a few months in jail.

African American farmers--Georgia.

Sharecropping--Georgia.

African American families--Southern States.

African American children--Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_002,  
TRT: 2:28:18 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis was born near Macon, Georgia, on the plantation where his father was a farmhand. He spent his early childhood on a farm that his family rented, and attended Macon's Eugenia Hamilton Elementary School until the fourth grade, when his father bought a farm outside of Macon. Ellis transferred to Pleasant Grove Elementary School, and often missed class during the harvest season. When he reached the sixth grade, his family lost the farm and moved to Macon, where his father worked as a groundskeeper at Mercer University. Ellis attended Ballard Hudson Junior High School and Ballard Hudson Senior High School, where he was a strong student. He secured his teacher's permission to work in town during his free period, but was expelled when the principal discovered him leaving the campus. He joined the U.S. Army, hoping to eventually finish his high school diploma. While stationed in France, Ellis befriended his commanding officer; and, with his help, completed his diploma abroad.

Race relations--Southern States.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--France--Paris.

Country life--Georgia--Macon.

African American teachers.

Farm life.

Role models.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_003,  
TRT: 3:29:10 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis joined the U.S. Army in 1963, shortly before President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination. Enticed by the higher pay, he volunteered to serve as a paratrooper, despite having never flown on an airplane. He was stationed in Paris, France, a liberal environment compared to his hometown of Macon, Georgia, where all public facilities were strictly

segregated. In 1966, Ellis was sent to Germany and then to Kentucky's Fort Campbell, before being assigned to quell the Detroit riots in 1967. Next, he served in the Vietnam War. After the Tet Offensive, he returned to civilian life; but struggled to readjust, and soon reenlisted. In 1969, his first child was born with spina bifida, caused by Ellis' exposure to Agent Orange during combat. He was deployed again to Vietnam, and finally discharged in 1971. He became a U.S. Army recruiter in Detroit, where his oldest daughter was born. While there, Ellis was inspired by the election of Coleman Young as Detroit's first black mayor.

Tet Offensive, 1968.

Vietnam, War, 1961-1975--African American..

Riots--Michigan--Detroit--20th century.

African American soldiers.

United States. Army. Airborne Division, 82nd.

United States. Army--Parachute troops.

Fort Bragg (N.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:55 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis completed college courses while working as a U.S. Army recruiter in Michigan and Georgia. In 1979, he was assigned to a recruitment post in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where he later became the general manager of St. Croix Cable TV. When Reverend Jesse L. Jackson announced his second presidential bid in 1988, Ellis returned to Georgia, and joined Reverend Jackson's campaign as the state regional manager. Then, he worked at the U.S. Census Bureau until 1991, when he became involved in local politics in his hometown of Macon, Georgia. There, Ellis created a public television show that addressed local issues, including public transportation and diversity. He narrowly lost a bid for the Georgia State Senate in 1991, and a mayoral campaign in 1995. Four years later, Ellis was elected as Macon's first African American mayor. In his initial term, he strengthened relations between police and the community, improved public transit and secured a Hope VI Grant to rebuild public housing.

African American politicians--Georgia.

United States. Army--African Americans.

Community development--Georgia--Macon.

Conference of the Mayors of the World's Major Cities.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:07 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis was the first African American mayor of Macon, Georgia. He experienced racism during his tenure, as well as religious discrimination after converting to Islam during his second term. In his role as mayor, Ellis helped organize the African Diaspora Heritage Trail, which marked significant locations from the history of slavery. He also helped build a \$37 million conference center and hotel in Macon, and was named a chief in Macon's sister city of Elmina, Ghana. Privately, he established the C. Jack Ellis Youth Foundation to aid the families of disabled children, and commended Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's assistance to developing countries. At the time of the interview, Ellis was preparing to run for a third mayoral term on a platform of job creation, urban redevelopment and crime reduction. He talks about his family, including his three sons, two daughters and wife, Tishangi

Bennett Ellis; and then concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon his life and legacy.

National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc.

African American politicians--Mayors--Georgia--Macon.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable C. Jack Ellis, Section A2011\_027\_001\_006,  
TRT: 6:09:35 ?

The Honorable C. Jack Ellis narrates his photographs.