

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ross, William Alexander Jackson, 1937-2007
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross,
Dates:	March 31, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:10).
Abstract:	Orthopedic surgeon and physician Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross (1937 - 2007) was the first African American submarine doctor in U.S. Navy history and the first African American officer to receive a Golden Dolphin Award from the U.S. Navy. He is chief of orthopedics at Herrick Hospital in Berkeley, California. Ross was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 31, 2005, in Oakland, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_089
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross was born on November 26, 1937, in Detroit, Michigan. After receiving his high school diploma from Detroit's Cass Tech High School in 1955, Ross attended the University of Michigan from 1956 to 1958, and Wayne State University from 1958 to 1960; he earned his medical degree from Meharry Medical College in 1964.

After medical school, Ross joined the Navy's Medical Corps as an intern in 1964, and then worked as a doctor in the U.S. Navy from 1969 through 1973. Becoming a qualified submarine medical officer in 1966, Ross became the first African American submarine doctor in U.S. Navy history. Ross served aboard the U.S.S. George C. Marshall from 1968 to 1969, where he was the first African American officer to receive a Golden Dolphin Award from the U.S. Navy.

After leaving the Navy and moving to Oakland, California, Ross joined the West Oak Health Center as a consultant orthopedic surgeon and teacher; he later became the chief of orthopedics at Herrick Hospital in Berkeley, California.

A member of the Arlington Medical Group, Ross is also a member of the National Medical Association; The American Medical Association; the NAACP; and Alpha Phi Alpha. Ross and his wife, Etna, have raised four children.

Mr. Ross passed away on January 14, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross was conducted by Loretta Henry on March 31, 2005, in Oakland, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Orthopedic surgeon and physician Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross (1937 - 2007) was the first African American submarine doctor in U.S. Navy history and the first African American officer to receive a Golden Dolphin Award from the U.S. Navy. He is chief of orthopedics at Herrick Hospital in Berkeley, California.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Ross, William Alexander Jackson, 1937-2007

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Ross, William Alexander Jackson, 1937-2007--Interviews

Orthopedists--Interviews

African American surgeons--Interviews

Ship physicians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Navy. Medical Dept.

Occupations:

Orthopedic Surgeon

Physician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, March 31, 2005. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, Section A2005_089_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross was born on November 26, 1937 in Detroit, Michigan to Julia Jackson Ross and Turner William Ross. His mother, who was distantly related to Maynard Jackson, was born in Marietta, Georgia and raised by her stepmother and father, who worked as a gardener. She studied at Clark University in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was born in Jacks Creek, Tennessee and studied drama at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee before moving to Detroit. There, he worked at the post office, and was a community organizer. Ross had a good relationship with his older sister, Lula Ross. They lived in a racially-mixed neighborhood on the west side of Detroit and attended church regularly. He was an engaged student at William T. Sampson Elementary School. The school offered a number of electives, and Ross played the triangle in music class. His dreams of becoming a doctor drew him to Cass Technical High School, an elite, majority-white school with a strong math and science curriculum.

Orthopedists--Interviews.

African American surgeons--Interviews.

Ship physicians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, Section A2005_089_001_002, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Dr. William Alexander worked and played sports while attending Cass Technical High School. His father could not afford college tuition, so Ross enrolled at Highland Park Community College and transferred to University of Michigan in Ann Arbor after a year. After his father fell ill, Ross transferred to Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. During his college years, he served as a social worker in a rough neighborhood. He entered Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee in 1960. During the summers, he worked at Naval hospitals around the East Coast, including Washington, D.C., where he participated in the March on Washington. Ross interned with the U.S. Naval Medical Corps at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital and, in 1966, became the first African American submarine doctor in naval history. He describes his experience with discriminatory housing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, discriminatory hiring when he worked at the Newport News Shipyard in Virginia, and stories from his sixth grade teacher.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, Section A2005_089_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross served as a doctor on the U.S.S. George C. Marshall. He also served as the Protestant lay leader, supplying adult magazines to the crew, and consoling men who received bad news while on duty. He played backgammon in the submarine's tournament, and he explored Spain and Scotland during submarine stops in Europe. After treating the notoriously harsh Admiral Hyman G. Rickover for the flu, Ross impressed the admiral with conversation over dinner. Serving with the U.S. Navy could be dangerous too, as Ross discovered when he fell into an underwater hole during training. Once, the submarine narrowly escaped detection by a Russian trawler. When there was a fire on board, he calculated how much time they had to surface before the crew faced a significant health risk from the smoke. Ross was awarded the Golden

Dolphin Award from the U.S. Navy for his work.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, Section
A2005_089_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross was introduced to jazz music by his cousin, Tommy Flanagan, who later became a famous musician. Ross and his wife, Etna Ross, met as children and started dating in college. Ross was featured in an Ebony article for being the first African American submarine captain in U.S. Naval history. Between patrols, he was the physician for the New London Whalers football team in New London, Connecticut. He did a fellowship at Yale University in New Haven Connecticut, then moved to San Diego, California for his residency. After four years of orthopedic training, Ross stayed in San Diego to work at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. He moved to Oakland, California, where he started his practice and worked at Children's Hospital. Ross was one of a handful of black orthopedic surgeons when he first started, but has seen the numbers rise during his career. Since retiring, Ross continued to see some of his favorite patients. He and his wife raised four successful children.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross, Section
A2005_089_001_005, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Dr. William Alexander Jackson Ross bonded with his father over oratorical contests and poetry. In his adulthood, he found that he liked to barbeque and fish. He entered a barbeque contest with a group of friends, and even traveled to the Amazon on a fishing trip. He worries that the United States is still not equal for African Americans, and points out the disparity in medical treatment blacks receive. He argues that African Americans are less likely to seek medical treatment despite the prevalence of breast and prostate cancer. Ross stresses the importance of his family, his wife, Etna Ross, and Christianity as the foundation of his beliefs. He expresses regret for not making the basketball team at Cass Technical High School, and hopes to be remembered as someone who lived life to the fullest while helping others. Ross concludes by narrating his photographs.