

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elaine Jones

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jones, Elaine R., 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones,
Dates:	March 6, 2007 and November 30, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006 and 2007
Physical Description:	11 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:38:32).
Abstract:	Civil rights lawyer Elaine Jones (1944 -) was the first female president and defense counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. She was also the first African American elected to the American Bar Association Board of Governors. Jones was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 6, 2007 and November 30, 2006, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_151
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Legal powerhouse and civil rights lawyer Elaine Ruth Jones was born on March 2, 1944 in Norfolk, Virginia, the daughter of a Pullman porter and a schoolteacher. Jones observed firsthand the impact of racism on her community, when one of her teachers was represented by Thurgood Marshall in the case, *Allen v. Hicks*.

Jones attended Howard University, where she worked her way through school. Joining the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and becoming dean of pledges, Jones graduated from Howard University in 1965, finishing school on the Dean's List. After college, she entered the Peace Corps, where she traveled to Turkey and taught English as a second language. Jones considered applying for a second tour of duty in Micronesia, but decided to return to school in 1967.

In 1967, Jones entered the University of Virginia Law School, where she was one of five black students and the only female. After her graduation in 1970, Jones was offered a job with a prominent Wall Street firm, but declined the offer in order to take a position at the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund (LDF), which, at that time, was headed by Jack Greenberg.

In 1972, Jones represented a black man on death row who had been accused of raping a white woman in the *Furman v. Georgia Jones* case. The Supreme Court decision on the case abolished the death penalty in thirty-seven states for twelve years, only two years after Jones had left law school. During this time, Jones argued numerous discrimination cases, including some against the country's biggest employers. These cases included *Patterson v. American Tobacco Co.*, *Stallworth v. Monsanto*, and *Swint v. Pullman Standard*. In 1973, Jones became the Legal Defense Fund's managing attorney.

In 1975, Jones left the NAACP's LDF to join President Ford's administration as Special Assistant to Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman. She returned to the LDF in 1977 as a litigator. During her continued tenure

with the LDF organization, she was instrumental in the passage of 1982's Voting Rights Act Amendment, 1988's Fair Housing Act and Civil Rights Restoration Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Jones was elected to the American Bar Association Board of Governors in 1989, the first African American to do so. In 1993, Jones became the first female president and defense counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. She was named one of *Ebony* Magazine's "10 Most Powerful Black Women" in 2001. Jones works as Director-Counsel of the LDF, and received an honorary degree from Spelman College in 2007.

Jones was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 30, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Elaine Jones was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 6, 2007 and November 30, 2006, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 11 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Elaine Jones (1944 -) was the first female president and defense counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. She was also the first African American elected to the American Bar Association Board of Governors.

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:

Jones, Elaine R., 1944-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Jones, Elaine R., 1944- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

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 Elaine Jones, March 6, 2007 and November 30, 2006. 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 Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_001_001, TRT: 0:30:47 ?

Elaine Jones was born on March 2, 1944 in Norfolk, Virginia to George Raymond Jones and Estelle Campbell Jones. Jones' paternal grandparents, George Baker Jones and Sarah Octavia Jones, were farmers in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where they purchased ten acres of land in 1910. Jones' father left the farm at seventeen years old, and moved to Norfolk. There, he worked in a retail warehouse, and joined the New Calvary Baptist Church, where he met Jones' mother, the pastor's daughter. Jones' maternal grandparents, Lulu Campbell and Pastor Daniel Campbell, were both college educated, and sent Jones' mother to the Miner Teachers College. Jones parents' eloped in 1937, so that her mother could continue working as a school teacher. Around this time, she taught Jones' father to write, as he had only a third grade education. He went on to become a Pullman porter, and joined the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, where he met A. Philip Randolph.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_001_002, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Elaine Jones grew up in the middle class, African American neighborhood of Broad Creek in Norfolk, Virginia. There, her family built a home at 1035 Majestic Avenue in 1951, and Jones attended Liberty Park Elementary School. In 1957, her mother, Estelle Campbell Jones, earned a teaching certificate at Virginia State College's Norfolk Branch, and returned to work as a teacher. Jones' father, George Raymond Jones, was a Pullman porter and member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He occasionally faced accusations of impropriety from white passengers, but was defended by the union's lawyers. Influenced by his experiences, Jones studied law and joined the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. later in life. She also describes the career success of her siblings, including her brother, George Daniel Jones, who pastored the Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and her sister, Gwendolyn Jones Jackson, who was the first African American woman to serve as a judge in Norfolk, Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_001_003, TRT: 0:30:32 ?

Elaine Jones grew up in Norfolk, Virginia, where she attended the New Calvary Baptist Church, and belonged to a Girl Scout troop. She also had her first experience in court there. At nine years old, Jones was summoned to court because she had visited the dentist without her parents' permission, and they refused to pay her bill. She presented her case to the judge, who ruled in her favor; and, from that time, aspired to become a lawyer. She studied at Norfolk's J. Cox Junior High School from 1956, and went on to attend the segregated Booker T. Washington High School from 1958. She excelled in English literature, mathematics and French; and graduated at the top of her class. In 1961, Jones received a full scholarship to Howard University in Washington, D.C. There, Jones met H. Patrick Swygert, who became the university president; and took a course on the philosophy of art alongside SNCC activist Stokely Carmichael. She also heard Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give the charter day address.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_004, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Elaine Jones was a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C from 1961 to 1965, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The university campus was visited by civil rights leader Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and, in a

philosophy class, Jones met fellow student Stokely Carmichael, who went on to become the chairman of SNCC. In 1965, President Lyndon Baines Johnson gave the commencement address at Jones' graduation ceremony, where he talked about his Great Society programs. Upon graduating, Jones entered the Peace Corps, which had been founded four years earlier. She briefly studied the Turkish language and culture at Princeton University; and then, from 1966 to 1967, taught English to medical students in Istanbul, Turkey. There, she was sometimes mistaken for Arab, and experienced discrimination as a result, including an occasion when children threw stones at her. She travelled during the breaks between semesters, visiting Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_005, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Elaine Jones served in the Peace Corps in Istanbul, Turkey from 1966 to 1967. She returned to the United States in the summer of 1967, and became the first African American woman to be admitted to the University of Virginia School of Law in Charlottesville, Virginia. After matriculating there, Jones faced racial and gender discrimination on a daily basis. Her white peers were especially hostile after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968. During this time, Jones took solace in her friendship with James W. Benton, Jr., who was the only other African American in her class. Later in 1968, Jones obtained a summer fellowship at the office of California State Senator Mervyn M. Dymally. The following summer, in 1969, Jones worked as a research intern at an oral history project based in Atlanta, Georgia. In this role, she travelled throughout the country to interview civil rights attorneys, including Gabrielle Kirk McDonald and Julius Chambers.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_006, TRT: 0:29:23 ?

Elaine Jones was an active member of the Black Law Students Association at the University of Virginia School of Law in Charlottesville, Virginia. During a research internship in 1969, she was influenced by her meetings with civil rights attorneys, many of whom worked at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF). In addition, she was mentored by the law school's dean, Monrad G. Paulsen, through whom she met LDF Director-Counsel Jack Greenberg. In 1970, Jones was offered a position at the elite law firm of Mudge Rose Guthrie Alexander and Ferdon; but rejected the offer, and successfully sought a position at the LDF. After passing the Virginia bar examination, Jones moved to New York City to join the LDF staff. Jones describes her early career and coworkers at the LDF, including Lynn Jones Huntley, Conrad K. Harper and James M. Nabrit, III. She also talks about her sister, Gwendolyn Jones, who was the second African American woman accepted to the University of Virginia School of Law.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_007, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

Elaine Jones joined the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) in 1970. She admired the work of earlier LDF attorneys like Thurgood Marshall, Constance Baker Motley and Robert L. Carter. From 1970 to 1972, Jones worked on death row cases in the Deep South as a member of the LDF's capital punishment and criminal justice reform team. During her cases, Jones received bomb threats from the Ku Klux Klan, whose members also picketed outside of the courthouses. With her partner, Anthony Amsterdam, Jones was assigned to the case of *Furman v. Georgia*. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision of the case in 1972 resulted in a moratorium on executions, although this was reversed by the decision of *Gregg v. Georgia* in 1976. Jones also describes the history of the LDF. Founded as part of the NAACP in 1940, the LDF was responsible for arguing the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*

in 1954; and, in 1957, was forced to separate from the NAACP by the Internal Revenue Service.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_008, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Elaine Jones served as an attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), where she transitioned from capital punishment to employment discrimination casework during the early 1970s. From that time, she worked closely with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1971, Jones argued the case of Phillips v. Martin Marietta Corporation, a gender-based employment discrimination lawsuit. She recalls her interactions with the plaintiff, Ida Phillips, who was white. In 1977, Jones argued Stallworth v. Monsanto Company, which challenged racially based employment discrimination; and lost the case. However, in 1982, she won the case of American Tobacco Company v. Patterson, which contested similar racial discrimination. Jones also argued Pullman-Standard v. Swint, a class action lawsuit regarding discriminatory union practices, which was settled in 1982 for \$8 million. In addition, Jones talks about attorneys Lani Guinier and Deval L. Patrick, who joined the LDF during this time.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_009, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Elaine Jones took leave from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) from 1974 to 1977 to work at the U.S. Department of Transportation under Secretary William T. Coleman, Jr. From 1977 to 1992, Jones directed the LDF branch in Washington, D.C., where she was mentored by NAACP lobbyist Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. During this time, she worked to appoint black federal judges through the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary and the American Bar Association. She also collaborated with Congresswoman Barbara Jordan to prevent Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland from passing legislation to split the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit into two circuits, as it was an important court for civil rights casework. In addition, Jones worked on the case of Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, which upheld affirmative action policies for college admissions in 1978; and lobbied for the 1982 Amendments of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_010, TRT: 0:31:08 ?

Elaine Jones succeeded Julius Chambers as head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) in 1993, becoming the organization's first female director-counsel. Upon the recommendation of the Ford Foundation, she reorganized the LDF's management structure, creating an emeritus board with Julius Chambers as co-chairman. Jones reflects upon her achievements as director-counsel, including the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of Gratz v. Bollinger, which upheld the University of Michigan's affirmative action admissions policy in 2003. Jones' deputy, Theodore Shaw, was a former member of the University of Michigan's law faculty, and instrumental in the LDF's success. Jones also describes her disappointments during her time at the LDF, including the erosion of civil rights legislation, like the Voting Rights Act of 1965, under multiple presidential administrations. Additionally, she talks about politicians' appeals to racism, and the history of President Richard Nixon's southern strategy.

Video Oral History Interview with Elaine Jones, Section A2006_151_002_011, TRT: 0:31:11 ?

Elaine Jones learned about the case of Kemba Smith in 1996, after reading an article written by journalist George Curry in Emerge magazine. A twenty-four year old African American university student, Smith was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison for participating in her boyfriend's drug trafficking activities. Under mandatory sentencing laws, the court could not take into

account that Smith's involvement was coerced by physical and emotional abuse. In 2000, Jones and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) secured Smith's release from prison. In 2004, Jones retired after an eleven-year tenure as director-counsel of the LDF. At the time of the interview, Jones had served a total of thirty-two years with the organization, and continued to act as a consultant. She was honored by her alma mater, the University of Virginia School of Law, with the Thomas Jefferson Medal in Law. Jones describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her legacy.