

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Ronald L. Ellis

PERSON

Ellis, Ronald L., 1950-

Alternative Names: The Honorable Ronald L. Ellis;

Life Dates: July 4, 1950-

Place of Birth: Lafourche Crossing, Louisiana, USA

Residence: Brooklyn, NY

Work: New York, NY

Occupations: Circuit Court Judge; Lawyer

Biographical Note

Judge Ronald L. Ellis was born on July 4, 1950 in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana to Ella Mae Ellis and Herman Ellis. In search of better job prospects, Ellis' father moved the family to New York City, where Ellis graduated from Cardinal Spellman High School in 1968. Ellis earned his B.Ch.E. degree in chemical engineering from Manhattan College in 1972, and entered New York University School of Law as a recipient of the prestigious Root-Tilden-Kern public interest scholarship.

During his second and third years of law school, Ellis became interested in the civil rights mission of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (NAACP LDF). After obtaining his J.D. degree, he worked briefly as a patent attorney for Exxon before joining the NAACP LDF in 1976, where he specialized in fair employment class action litigation. From 1984 to 1990, Ellis served as the organization's Fair Employment Program director. Ellis went on to serve as the NAACP LDF's Poverty & Justice Program director, where he worked on the landmark civil rights case *Sheff v. O'Neil*. In 1993, Ellis was sworn in as a magistrate judge for the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. As a magistrate judge, Ellis handled pre-trial matters, including arraignment and determining bail. Ellis drew public criticism in 2009 for deciding not to remand fraudulent investor Bernie Madoff, in light of allegations that he had violated the terms of his bail. He also ruled on the City of New York's lawsuit against documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, and refused to suppress a subpoena demanding that the BBC release unaired footage from its documentary *Arafat Investigated*.

In addition to his courtroom duties, Ellis mentored many law clerks, and served as an

adjunct law professor at New York University School of Law, New York Law School and Columbia School of Law, often teaching courses on race and the law. He co-authored the chapter “Achieving Race and Gender Fairness in the Courtroom” in The Judge’s Book, and was a member of the Federal Bar Council and the Metropolitan Black Bar Association.

Ellis and his wife, Kathleen, have two sons, Jamil and Jelani, and a granddaughter, Alexandra.

Judge Ronald L. Ellis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 27, 2016.

Related Entries

New York University School of Law [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

J.D.

Manhattan College [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

B.Ch.E.

Cardinal Spellman High School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

St. Thomas the Apostle School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

St. Luke School [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Columbia University School of Law [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Professor

New York University Law School [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

professor

New York Law School [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Professor

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 197602 to 199307]

Counsel

Exxon Research & Engineering [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 197508 to 197601]

Patent Counsel

United States District Court [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 19931116 to ?]

United States Magistrate Judge

National Center for Fair & Open Testing [MEMBEROf]

[from 1981 to 1994]

Chair

Root-Tilden Program, New York University Law School [MEMBEROf]

[from 1983 to 2008]

Member

Public Interest Law Foundation, New York University Law School [MEMBEROf]

[from 1986 to 1988]

Chair

Poverty & Race Research Action Council [MEMBEROf]

[from 1991 to 1994]

Member