

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Anita J. Ponder

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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>	Ponder, Anita, 1961-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 19, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:05:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Museum executive and city council member Anita J. Ponder (1961 - ) was the president of the Macon City Council and director of education at the Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia. Ponder was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 19, 2006, in Macon, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_002
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Anita J. Ponder is president of the Macon City Council and director of education at the Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia, the largest museum of its kind in the Southeast. Prior to serving on the city council, Ponder served as judge of the Municipal Court in her hometown of Fort Valley, Georgia. Ponder was born April 16, 1961, the oldest of three children of Clifford and Margie Ponder of Fort Valley, Georgia.

Ponder received her B.S. degree in journalism/communications from Florida

A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida, and her J.D. degree from South Texas College of Law in Houston, Texas. She served as editor of the *Law Review* during her second year of law school. Ponder formed a lucrative partnership with a fellow classmate and practiced criminal and personal injury law immediately following law school. She resigned from the firm and returned to her hometown to fulfill her life long ambition to work in the public sector. Ponder became judge of the Municipal Court in Fort Valley, a position that she held for four and a half years. She volunteered at the Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia, while it was in its infancy. She helped the museum to expand its exhibits nationally and internationally, and became director of its educational programs.

Ponder was appointed to the Macon City Council in 1998. In her role as president of the council, she has aided in the revitalization of the city through the neighborhood redevelopment plan. She continues to play a major role in the construction of the multi-million dollar facility that will house the Tubman Museum. Annually, in December, Ponder and friends host the Holiday Feast for All that feeds community members during the holiday season. Ponder is the editor of a recently published book: *Standing on Their Shoulders: A Celebration of the Wisdom of African American Women* by Dr. Catherine Meeks. She raises Arabian horses, collects antique cars, and organizes antique car shows.

Ponder serves on the boards of the Macon State College Foundation, Macon Chamber of Commerce, Georgia Coalition of Black Women, and Newtown Macon. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and Rotary International.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Anita J. Ponder was conducted by Evelyn Pounds on January 19, 2006, in Macon, Georgia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Museum executive and city council member Anita J. Ponder (1961 - ) was the president of the Macon City Council and director of education at the Tubman African American Museum in Macon, Georgia.

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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:

Ponder, Anita, 1961-

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Jackson, Adrian (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ponder, Anita, 1961---Interviews

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African American women judges--Georgia--Interviews

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African American women civic leaders--Georgia--Macon--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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Macon (Ga.)

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Tubman African-American Museum

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## **Occupations:**

City Council Member

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Museum Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

PoliticalMakers|EducationMakers

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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 Anita J. Ponder, January 19, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Anita J. Ponder, Section  
A2006\_002\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:42 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder was born on April 16, 1961 in Fort Valley, Georgia to Margie Jenkins Ponder and Clifford Ponder. Her maternal grandfather received land in Lakeland, Georgia from his father, a white plantation owner, on which he farmed tobacco. The Jenkins family sold watermelons and other food in the local market while selling the tobacco to a company. Her mother was born in Lakeland to Rosa and Teroma Jenkins. Ponder's mother grew up on the family farm with her two sisters and sent Ponder there every summer. Ponder's father was born in Fosyth, Georgia and raised by his mother, Estelle Ponder, who was a teacher, and his two maternal aunts. His mother sent him to family members in other states every summer so he could learn about new places while travelling. Ponder's great-aunt sold cakes out of her house. Ponder remembers her fondness for her paternal grandmother and the devastation she felt upon learning of her death while a student at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

African American women judges--Georgia--Interviews.  
African American women civic leaders--Georgia--Macon--Interviews.

Women museum directors--Georgia--Macon--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section  
A2006\_002\_001\_002, TRT: 0:31:05 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder's maternal grandfather and his siblings owned a farm in Lakeland, Georgia on which they harvested tobacco and watermelon. They also grew vegetables and fruit, and had a smokehouse for meat. Ponder's family was well-respected in town, and she was able to buy snacks from local stores on her grandfather's credit. However, when her teenage cousin, Billy Joe Jenkins, began dating a white girl, the town was upset. Ponder's relatives found his death by car accident later that summer suspicious. Ponder remembers her bed-ridden paternal great-grandmother, who appeared to have Native American heritage. Ponder and her paternal grandmother were very close. While growing up, Ponder admired her 1961 Impala. Ponder's parents met when her mother was a student and her father worked as an accountant at Fort Valley State College. Ponder attended a gifted program at the college as a young child. She describes her father's devotion to his family, attributing it to her paternal grandfather's absence from his life.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section  
A2006\_002\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:04 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder lived near Fort Valley State College in Georgia, where she attended a gifted and talented program as a child. After school, she often stayed on campus and professors taught her art, tennis, and biology. Although both of her parents worked, they attended her tennis, baseball and basketball games and supported her extracurricular activities. After school, she would often stay with a neighbor, Ms. Smith, until her parents arrived at home. Ponder's neighborhood was economically diverse. She played with children from her street and the nearby housing projects until her family moved to the Ponderosa neighborhood, a new development comprised mostly of middle class African Americans. Upon joining a

mostly-white baseball team, Ponder made friends with many of her teammates as they cared more about her skills than her race. Ponder describes her younger sisters, Keisha Ponder-Green and Celeste Ponder. She remembers learning about the history of racism in the United States from her family.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section A2006\_002\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:11 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder attended Peach Valley Elementary, Middle and High Schools in Fort Valley, Georgia. Her middle-school science teacher, Virginia Dixon, inspired Ponder because she was a good teacher, taught karate, headed a youth program and was a mother. Ms. Hawkins, another influential teacher, encouraged Ponder throughout her life and later befriended Ponder's grandmother. As a child, Ponder was well-mannered but active, and she was frequently injured from playing dangerously, which frightened her mother. Impressed by the politicians and lawyers she saw at the state capitol, Ponder aspired to be a lawyer from a young age. She attended Fort Valley's Trinity Baptist Church and remained a member there, although she stopped attending church for a while in college. At Peach County High School, Ponder was on the basketball and tennis teams led by Coach Barnes, and she placed third in the state for tennis. Travelling for her sports activities exposed Ponder to different parts of the country.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section A2006\_002\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:05 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder saw the devastation caused by the 1975 tornado in Fort Valley, Georgia. Ponder played drums with a neighborhood band as a preteen and was the first female on the drum line in the Peach County High School band. Despite her talent as a high school basketball player, Ponder always focused on becoming a lawyer. She attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee partly because it was close to her maternal grandparents. Jean Brown, a coach at Fort Valley State College, helped Ponder obtain a basketball, tennis, and academic scholarship package. While majoring in journalism to improve her writing, Ponder also completed

an internship at Architectural Digest. She enrolled in law school at Texas Southern University in Houston for a semester before being recruited by South Texas College of Law, which was trying to increase its minority population. She also describes how her constituents associate her with her high school basketball career and tourist attractions in Peach County.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section A2006\_002\_001\_006, TRT: 0:30:03 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder became the first African American editor of the South Texas Law Review. Although she experienced discrimination at South Texas College of Law, Ponder recognized that not every professor and student was racist. After law school, she opened a firm with a former classmate, Olivia Jordan. At Ponder and Jordan, Ponder specialized in criminal and personal injury cases. After representing several clients associated with drug cartels, Ponder realized she wanted to change careers and move back to Georgia. She commuted between Texas and Georgia for six months while finishing her cases and waiting to take the Georgia bar examination. During this time, Ponder discovered the Tubman Museum African American Museum in Macon and began volunteering there. In 1993, the mayor of Fort Valley, Georgia appointed Ponder as municipal judge for the city. After resigning, she successfully ran for Macon, Georgia City Council, where she served as president for two terms while working to improve housing in the city.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section A2006\_002\_001\_007, TRT: 0:30:38 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder spent much of her two terms as president of Macon City Council revitalizing downtown Macon, Georgia; presiding over meetings; appointing committee members; and serving on boards, including NewTown Macon, Macon Roads Improvement Board, and Macon State College. During her tenure as city council president, she also served as education director of the Tubman African American Museum, where she focused on fundraising and developing curricula that would reach a wide variety of students and visitors. In describing the musical history of Macon, Ponder notes the legacy of the

renovated Douglass Theatre, which hosted many African American artists, like Otis Redding, and Miss Anne's Tic Toc Room, a venue where Little Richard regularly performed. Ponder shares advice for aspiring young professionals. She also reflects upon her life, legacy, the importance of history, how she would like to be remembered, and her hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Anita J. Ponder, Section  
A2006\_002\_001\_008, TRT: 0:31:12 2006/01/19

Anita J. Ponder narrates her photographs.