Overview of the Collection

**Repository:** The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

**Creator:** Johnson, Josie, 1930-

**Title:** The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson,

**Dates:** August 11, 2002

**Bulk Dates:** 2002

**Physical Description:** 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:43:15).

**Abstract:** Academic administrator and education consultant Josie Johnson (1930 - ) was the founder of the Black Studies department at University of Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Board of Regents. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 11, 2002, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

**Identification:** A2002_143

**Language:** The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in 1931, Josie Robinson Johnson has played an active role in the civil rights movement since her teenage years, when she and her father canvassed her hometown of Houston to gather signatures on an anti-poll tax petition.

In the early 1960s, Johnson lobbied professionally for passage of bills concerning such issues as fair housing and employment opportunities. In 1964, she traveled from Minneapolis to Mississippi with an integrated group of women to witness and take part in the struggle there. After visiting an open-air freedom school where blacks were organizing, the group learned the school was bombed later that
Johnson was born on October 7, 1930, in Houston. As the daughter of Houston civil rights pioneers, she grew up with a deep concern for social justice and civil rights. After receiving her B.A. in sociology from Fisk University and her M.A. in education from the University of Massachusetts, Johnson went to work in 1956 as a lobbyist to help pass Minnesota's anti-discrimination laws. In 1967, she served one year as the acting director for the Minneapolis Urban League. In 1971, after teaching in the African American Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, she was appointed to the Minnesota Board of Regents, where she served until 1973. In 1992, she accepted the position as associate vice president in charge of minority affairs and directed their All-University Forum as diversity director. The University of Minnesota established the Annual Josie
Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Josie Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 11, 2002, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Academic administrator and education consultant Josie Johnson (1930 - ) was the founder of the Black Studies department at University of Minnesota and a member of the Minnesota Board of Regents.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Johnson, Josie, 1930-
Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Johnson, Josie, 1930---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)
The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection
University of Minnesota

Occupations:

Academic Administrator
Education Consultant

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History
Josie Johnson describes her family background. Her mother, Josie McCullough Robinson, was born on May 7, 1907 in Houston, Texas. Her maternal great-grandfather fled the potato famine in Ireland. Her maternal grandmother owned a drug store in San Antonio, Texas. Johnson’s father, Judson W. Robinson was born on February 7, 1904 in Crockett, Texas to Willie Robinson, a Baptist preacher. Her paternal great-grandfather was a
Baptist preacher. Her paternal great-grandfather was a former slave who lived to be 112 and told stories of his job putting out the foot stool for people to get down from coaches. Johnson’s parents met while attending Prairie View University in Texas. Her father worked for the railroad as a dining car waiter for A. Philip Randolph. Johnson remembers playing with her brothers and living in a close knit neighborhood in Houston, Texas. She attended all-black St. Nicholas Catholic School from kindergarten through twelfth grade and graduated from there in 1947. Her parents were active in the community and served as her role models.

Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson, Section A2002_143_001_002, TRT: 0:29:10 2002/08/11

Josie Johnson talks about her education and young adulthood. Johnson avoided attributes feelings of inferiority due to her family’s protectiveness, living in an all-black neighborhood, and avoiding public transportation. In high school at St. Nicholas Catholic School, Johnson played the piano and performed in school plays. Johnson attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee with the intention of going into medicine. She graduated in 1951 with a bachelor’s degree and then pursued graduate work in sociology at Southern Texas University in Houston, Texas. After her husband completed his military service, they moved to Boston, Massachusetts where he attended M.I.T. and she worked at a chemistry lab at Harvard University. When her husband was hired at Honeywell, their family moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota where Johnson became involved in the NAACP and many other community organizations. She also helped Mahmoud El-Kati develop the African-American Studies program at the University of Minnesota.

Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson, Section A2002_143_001_003, TRT: 0:30:30 2002/08/11

Josie Johnson talks about her civil rights activism. Johnson recalls that the black community in Minneapolis, Minnesota felt solidarity with those in the South in the 1960s. Johnson traveled to Jackson, Mississippi in 1964 as part of Dorothy Height’s program “Wednesdays in Mississippi” in which groups of women traveled to Mississippi to report on the Civil Rights struggle. While in
Mississippi, Johnson attended a community meeting at a church that men guarded with shotguns. She also went to a Freedom School in Vicksburg, Mississippi which was bombed the next day. When she returned, Johnson shared her firsthand experiences with others. Malcolm Moos, the President of the University of Minnesota was responsive to student protests and instituted the African American Studies program in 1967. Along with other faculty including Lillian Anthony, Johnson developed the program with an emphasis on community involvement. Johnson comments on the importance of teaching about the contributions of African Americans.

Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson, Section A2002_143_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2002/08/11

Josie Johnson talks about her political involvement. Johnson served as Chief of Staff for HistoryMaker Lieutenant Governor George Brown in Denver, Colorado. During his tenure, they sponsored an “Arts in the Capital” program that highlighted artists of color and worked to increase minorities’ union membership. Johnson worked on her brother’s campaign in Houston, Texas before returning to the University of Minnesota as a senior fellow in the College of Education in 1985. Johnson talks about the dispute over busing in Minneapolis, Minnesota schools. While busing is typically seen as a means of integration, Johnson contends that discrimination persists in schools and resources should be used to strengthen community schools. Johnson comments on the systemic racism that has caused a number of health and social problems for the black community. Having witnessed history repeating itself, Johnson sees hopelessness in the community and points out the better treatment of recently immigrated Africans.

Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson, Section A2002_143_001_005, TRT: 0:30:50 2002/08/11

Josie Johnson describes her efforts to bridge the African American and Jewish communities in Minneapolis, Minnesota following HM Minister Louis Farrakhan’s visit to the University of Minnesota. Johnson organized focus groups and panels as part of a two-year plan to bring together African Americans and Jews. Johnson then
became the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Minnesota where she worked to increase retention and recruitment of faculty and students of color. Johnson helped to make diversity a centerpiece of the university’s strategic plan and to help fund departments hiring faculty of color. Johnson reflects upon being a black woman in academia, her legacy, and her parents’ pride in her accomplishments. Johnson wants to be remembered as a fair and tireless advocate for civil rights and human rights. Johnson concludes by narrating her photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Josie Johnson, Section A2002_143_001_006, TRT: 0:12:36 2002/08/11

Josie Johnson narrates her photographs.