

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sandra Johnson

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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>	Johnson, Sandra, 1938-2010
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 17, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:58:28).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education consultant and special education administrator Sandra Johnson (1938 - 2010 ) is the former director of special education for the Washington D.C. public schools and is the owner of an educational consulting firm. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 17, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_229
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

A versatile scholar, educator and administrator, Sandra Ford Johnson has been a proactive advocate for children with special needs. Born in Chicago in 1938, Johnson was one of the first African Americans selected to attend the University of Chicago's prestigious Laboratory School.

At the age of fifteen, Johnson enrolled at the University of Chicago, where she earned a B.A. in 1958. After graduation, Johnson moved to Los Angeles, where she taught in Hollywood and Studio City. Seeking new challenges, she moved to Heidelberg, Germany, in 1967 as part of the Department of Defense's Overseas Dependent Schools program. Johnson later earned her M.Ed. from the University of Southern California and in 1976 received her Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Kansas, specializing in improving communication and networking in the public school system.

Johnson put her knowledge and experience to excellent use as assistant superintendent of the Washington, D.C. school system. As an administrator, she implemented programs in social work, school psychology, health, counseling, guidance and attendance for 140,000 students. Additionally, she created and produced *Positive Plus*, a cable TV program that featured school success stories. Johnson ultimately was promoted to state director for special education, with oversight of all policies and programs for students with disabilities in the District of Columbia.

In 1997, Johnson formed her own consulting company, SE3, providing services to both government and business. She has consulted and advised Native American tribes; performed research in Kenya for the U.S. Agency for International Development; and worked as a legislative liaison and public policy advocate for the National Association of Pupil Services Administrators. Her well-respected work also earned her an assignment in the office of New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. Johnson lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband, Harry Johnson.

# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sandra Johnson was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 17, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education consultant and special education administrator Sandra Johnson (1938 - 2010 ) is the former director of special education for the Washington D.C. public schools and is the owner of an educational consulting firm.

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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:

Johnson, Sandra, 1938-2010

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Sandra, 1938-2010--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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### Occupations:

Education Consultant

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Special Education Administrator

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Sandra Johnson, September 17, 2003. 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).

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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 Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Sandra Johnson was born on January 7, 1938. Her father, John Ford, was born in Tyler, Texas in 1906. Her father and his siblings were highly educated and attended Northwestern University and the University of Chicago for graduate degrees. As a child, Johnson visited her paternal grandmother, Ophelia Ford,

who lived on a farm in East Texas. Johnson's mother, Eugenia Swader Ford, was born in 1912 in Liberty, Missouri and earned her B.A. from the University of Kansas. Johnson's maternal grandmother, Vassie Willis Swader, eventually came to live with the family in Chicago, Illinois. Johnson's parents met in Chicago while they were both graduate students. Upon marriage, neither completed their studies. Johnson was raised in a middle-class African American community on the South Side of Chicago where she attended the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. She describes being interviewed and accepted into the school when she was five years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Sandra Johnson attended the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools in Chicago, Illinois. Though the school was located on the South Side of Chicago not far from her house, it was in a different neighborhood that was majority Jewish. The school was academically rigorous and she participated in outside activities, including tennis at the Rosenwald Courts apartments in Bronzeville, gymnastics, and skill-building programs. Johnson describes the Lab School's curriculum which included speed reading drills, but did not include positive portrayals of African American history. In 1953, Johnson graduated from the Lab School after the tenth grade, and enrolled at the University of Chicago as an undergraduate where she was exposed to William Allison Davis and other black intellectuals. Though she was in college, she was subject to her parents' structured home life until she was eighteen.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Sandra Johnson majored in liberal arts at the University of Chicago, the only degree offered to students, such as herself, who had matriculated after the tenth grade. She had many career interests as a child, including dancing, becoming a movie star, and becoming an elevator operator at Marshall Fields. She had no interest in becoming a teacher. Johnson worked as a keypunch operator at People's Gas Company as a summer job and, at nineteen, was hired as a researcher for the Institute for Psychoanalysis. She went back to school to study psychology and moved to Los Angeles, California where she worked as a counselor for juveniles. There, she earned her teacher's certification. She recalls being discriminated against as she searched for teaching jobs before taking it upon herself to apply at a school in the Studio City neighborhood. She was welcomed by the principal enthusiastically and taught there for four years.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_004, TRT: 0:27:20 ?

Sandra Johnson taught in Studio City in Los Angeles, California for four and a half years. Her students were receptive to her, though she was the only African American teacher and there were no black students. She recalls a student, whose father was an accountant with star clients, trying to set her up with a famous actor who went on to date Jill St. John. Her school's principal advised her to always be exactly where she was supposed to be to avoid legal trouble with parents. Johnson applied for a teaching job for Overseas Dependents Schools for children of the U.S. military. She was selected in 1966 or 1967 and assigned to Germany, where she taught, travelled the continent, and met her husband, who was in the U.S. Military. Johnson stayed in Germany for several years. She describes her reaction to the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Johnson returned to the U.S. in the early 1970s and enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the University of Kansas.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Sandra Johnson taught at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas while she earned her Ph.D. in administration from the university. After completing her

degree in 1976, she was hired as principal of a high school in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and remained there until her husband, who was in the U.S. military, was transferred to Washington, D.C. In D.C., Johnson worked with African American students for the first time and volunteered for the White House Office of Presidential Correspondence during the Jimmy Carter administration. She served as assistant superintendent and state director for special education for the District of Columbia Public Schools where she worked with HistoryMaker Floretta McKenzie and advocated for students with disabilities and other special needs. Upon the election of Bill Clinton, she again volunteered in various White House offices. She recalls the scandal surrounding Bill Clinton's infidelity. At the end of his term, she was asked to work for Senator Hillary Clinton.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Johnson, Section A2003\_229\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:18 ?

Sandra Johnson was a volunteer for the Democratic Party and worked as a surrogate to promote voting among African Americans. At the time of the interview, she offered students in a nearby high school support for testing and college preparations. She also advocated for Native American students and students with special needs and disabilities. Johnson describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, particularly around voting and education. She reflects upon her legacy, considers what she would have done differently in her life and concludes by narrating her photographs.