

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook

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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>	Cook, Suzan Johnson, 1957-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 1, 2005 and July 24, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005 and 2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:44:24).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Pastor The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook (1957 - ) was the first African American woman to be named pastor by the American Baptist Association and the first woman chaplain for the New York City Police Department. She is co-founder and chief operating officer of JONCO Productions, Inc., a sales, management, and diversity firm, and is the author of the bestselling, "Too Blessed to Be Stressed," released in 2002. Cook was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 1, 2005 and July 24, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_251
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Religious leader and corporate entrepreneur Suzan Johnson Cook was born January 28, 1957, in New York City. Her mother was a schoolteacher and her father, a trolley car driver. They founded a security guard business that moved the

family from a Harlem, New York, tenement to a home in the Gunn Hill section of the Bronx, New York. Cook was one of the few African American children to attend the Riverdale Country Day School in the Bronx, and her parents helped to organize an African American Parent Teachers Association. Cook studied acting and singing at Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, where she received her B.S. degree. She has also received her M.A. degree in education from Columbia University, her M.Div. degree from Union Theological Seminary and her D.Min. degree from Ohio's United Theological Seminary. She is also a graduate of Harvard University's President's Administrative Fellows Program.

In 1983, Cook was appointed pastor of the Mariner's Temple Baptist Church in lower Manhattan, becoming the first African American woman to be named pastor by the American Baptist Association in its two hundred year history. At Mariner's Temple, she inaugurated the Wednesday Lunch Hour of Power. After thirteen years of service, in 1996, she became the founder and senior pastor of the Bronx Fellowship Christian Church. In 1990, David Dinkins appointed Cook as the first woman chaplain to the New York Police Department. She was also the first woman to be elected president of the Hampton University Minister's Conference.

Cook served on the Domestic Policy Council in the White House in 1993, and with HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros as a consultant on Faith Initiatives from 1994 to 1997. Then, she became the co-founder and chief operating officer of JONCO Productions, Inc., a sales, management, and diversity firm which hosts a speaker's bureau and media/book distributions. She is the author of several books including the best seller, *Too Blessed To Be Stressed*, released in 2002.

In 1997, *Ebony* magazine named Cook one of the top fifteen women in ministry in the nation, and in 2000, she was named one of New York's top five preachers. Cook lives in New York City with her husband, Ronald and their two sons, Samuel David and Christopher Daniel.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook was conducted by Adrienne Jones and Shawn Wilson on December 1, 2005 and July 24, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Pastor The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook (1957 - ) was the first African American woman to be named pastor by the American Baptist Association and the first woman chaplain for the New York City Police Department. She is co-founder and chief operating officer of JONCO Productions,

Inc., a sales, management, and diversity firm, and is the author of the bestselling, "Too Blessed to Be Stressed," released in 2002.

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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:**

Cook, Suzan Johnson, 1957-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghlea, Neculai (Videographer)

(Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Cook, Suzan Johnson, 1957---Interviews

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African American women clergy--New York (State)--New York--Interviews

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African American women executives--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:**

Pastor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ReligionMakers

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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 The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, December 1, 2005 and July 24, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## 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 The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/12/01

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook was born on January 28, 1957 to Dorothy Cuthbertson Johnson and Wilbert Johnson. Cook's mother was born in Monroe, North Carolina, where she was raised during the Great Depression by an aunt after losing her mother at an early age. Cook's mother's family originally were sharecroppers, but later bought their own land in North Carolina. Her father was born in Petersburg, Virginia, where he and his siblings were sharecroppers for a white woman named Miss Kitty. The Johnsons later financially supported Miss Kitty after her income from farming declined in the 1960s. Both of Cook's parents moved to New York City, where

her mother taught at P.S. 194 and her father worked for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Her parents married and bought a home in a predominantly white neighborhood in the northeastern Bronx. Cook's father founded Johnson Security Bureau, where she worked as a child. She reflects on the value she places on her entirely African American heritage.

African American women clergy--New York (State)--New York--Interviews.

African American women executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:31 2005/12/01

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook grew up in the northeastern Bronx, New York with her family, who often socialized in the Renaissance Ballroom and other civic centers of Harlem. Her neighbors were largely Italian or Jewish, and she attended the majority white P.S. 78, where she was in the gifted program, until seventh grade. Cook recalls white classmates refusing to sit next to her and criticizing her Afro hairstyle during grade school. She was introduced to the Civil Rights Movement by her parents, who read the New York Amsterdam News, took her to see Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speak, and enrolled her in Freedom Schools. Cook attended both Union Baptist Church, where her father belonged, and Rendall Memorial Presbyterian Church, where her mother belonged, and spent summers at Incarnation Camp in Ivoryton, Connecticut. In the seventh grade, she began attending the prestigious Riverdale County School. Cook remembers her early calling to the ministry at the age of thirteen.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_002\_003, TRT: 0:29:52 2007/07/24

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook befriended Katie Geneva Cannon, the first black female Presbyterian minister, while a teenager. She attended Riverdale Country School in the Bronx, New York from 1969 to 1973. Cook enrolled at Emerson College in Boston to study speech pathology, but changed her focus to drama. At Emerson, she was a member of St. Paul

AME Church in Cambridge, pastored by Reverend John Richard Bryant. Parishioners included Ronald McNair and HistoryMakers Reverend Dr. Floyd Flake and Reverend Dr. Elaine Flake. Cook graduated in 1976 and returned to New York City, where she earned her master's degree at Columbia Teachers College and joined Union Baptist Church. In 1978, Cook was hired as a floor director at WJLA-TV in Washington, D.C., working for anchor HistoryMaker Paul Berry. She left for a position at Boston's WBZ-TV, then traveled to Africa with Yolanda King before being hired at WPLG-TV in Miami. In 1981, she began her M.Div. degree at New York City's Union Theological Seminary.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_002\_004, TRT: 0:29:12 2007/07/24

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook attended Union Baptist Church in Harlem, where her father had worshipped, and which was pastored by Reverend Dr. Ollie B. Wells, Sr. She studied for the ministry at Union Theological Seminary, where her teachers included Cornel West and HistoryMakers James H. Cone and Reverend Dr. James A. Forbes. She remembers her classmates, Reverend Dr. Laura B. Sinclair and Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas. When she was ordained in 1983, she encountered skepticism from her congregation about a woman being called to the ministry. Cook worked for the American Baptist Churches under Reverend Carl Flemister, which led to her becoming the interim pastor of Mariner's Temple in Manhattan. She describes how she grew the parish using campaign techniques learned during her brother, Charles Johnson's, run for the New York State Assembly. Mariner's Temple chose her as the full-time pastor, and her installation was attended by HistoryMakers Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker and Reverend Gardner Taylor.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_002\_005, TRT: 0:30:19 2007/07/24

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook founded the Lunch Hour of Power service for New York City workers on their Wednesday lunch breaks. Attendees included HistoryMakers Charles B. Rangel, David N.

Dinkins, Lee P. Brown and Adelaide Sanford. She was recruited by the New York City Police Department and its commissioner, Benjamin Ward, to become the first black female police chaplain. Due to a paperwork delay, Cook instead entered the President's Administrative Fellows Program at Harvard Divinity School for 1989 and 1990. During that year, she wrote her first book, 'Too Blessed to be Stressed.' Returning to New York in 1990, Cook accepted the position of police chaplain. She met Ronald Cook in 1991, and married him the same year at Riverside Church with HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. James A. Forbes presiding. Cook held a prayer service with HistoryMaker Reverend Dr. Calvin O. Butts at John Street United Methodist Church on September 12, 2001, after the deaths of many policemen during the 9/11 attacks.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Section A2005\_251\_002\_006, TRT: 0:15:00 2007/07/24

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook married Ronald Cook in 1991, and had her first child, Samuel Cook, in October 1992. In December 1992, she submitted an application to be a White House Fellow for the Clinton presidential administration. Under the coaching of political operative Meg Armstrong, she was accepted to the program, where her responsibilities included writing speeches for President Bill Clinton's appearances at African American churches. Cook moved to Washington, D.C. with her nine-month old son to take the position. She recalls Clinton's interpersonal skills as a politician, especially his memory for names and his empathy for everyone he meets, regardless of their position. Appointed to the Domestic Policy Council under Carol Rasco, Cook worked on issues of consolidated states, homelessness and violence. At the White House, she developed a friendship with Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper Gore, who became the godmother of her second son, Christopher Cook.