

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Iola 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, Iola
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Iola Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 3, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:47:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Television news anchor and television host Iola Johnson (1950 - ) was the first woman and the first African American news anchor in Dallas, running a highly successful co-anchor team with Tracy Rowlett for over 12 years. She was also morning news anchor at Dallas radio station KKDA, and later became the host of a weekly community affairs show, 'Positively Texas,' on KTVT-TV in Dallas. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 3, 2006, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_088
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Iola Vivian Johnson was born on October 10, 1950, in Texarkana, Arkansas, to Horace and Eurea Lee Johnson. Her father was a respected land owner and rancher. Johnson's family moved to a predominantly white neighborhood Tucson, Arizona, when she was four years old. She attended Mills Elementary School and Mansfield Junior High School. Johnson graduated from Tucson High School in

1968 and attended the University of Arizona. She has degrees in political science and journalism.

Johnson was the first woman and the first African American to write for the ten o'clock news for the NBC affiliate KBOA in Tucson, Arizona. In 1973, Johnson was approached to take a position with WFAA-TV in Dallas, Texas. She worked her way to becoming the first woman and the first black news anchor in Dallas. Johnson worked for WFAA-TV for more than 12 years, where she and co-anchor Tracy Rowlett had the longest running and most successful news anchor team in the history of the Dallas-Fort Worth television industry. Johnson became the highest paid local news anchor and the "Most Popular Woman in Dallas" according to *Dallas Magazine*.

Johnson left her job at the television station in 1984 to start her own business. A couple of years later, Johnson became the morning news anchor at radio station KKDA in Dallas, after spending a year in St. Louis, Missouri. She reappeared on television in 1990, where she once again teamed up with Tracy Rowlett, this time at the CBS affiliate in Dallas. She later became the host of a weekly community affairs show, *Positively Texas* on KTVT-TV in Dallas.

Johnson has been recognized numerous times for her excellence in journalism. She also received the Life Time Achievement Award from the Dallas-Forth Worth Association of Black Communicators.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Iola Johnson was conducted by Denise Gines on May 3, 2006, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television news anchor and television host Iola Johnson (1950 - ) was the first woman and the first African American news anchor in Dallas, running a highly successful co-anchor team with Tracy Rowlett for over 12 years. She was also morning news anchor at Dallas radio station KKDA, and later became the host of a weekly community affairs show, 'Positively Texas,' on KTVT-TV in Dallas.

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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, Iola

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson, Iola--Interviews

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African American television journalists--Texas--Dallas--Interviews

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Television news anchors--Texas--Dallas--Interviews

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Women television journalists--Texas--Dallas--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:**

Television News Anchor

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Television Host

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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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 Iola Johnson, May 3, 2006. 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 Iola Johnson, Section  
A2006\_088\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:48 2006/05/03

Iola Johnson was born on October 10, 1950 in Texarkana, Arkansas to Eurea Hubbard Johnson and Horace Johnson. Johnson's maternal family was descended from landowning African American farmers near Texarkana. Her maternal grandparents, John Hubbard, Sr. and Smithie Garland Hubbard, raised six children on a Hooks, Texas ranch, where Johnson's mother was her father's favorite. Hubbard Johnson attended Texas College in Tyler, Texas. Like Johnson's paternal grandfather, her father was a rancher, and met her mother while purchasing cattle from Johnson's maternal family. They married and had three daughters. The youngest, Horacetene Johnson Shults, was named for her father. Due to their community stature and wealth, Johnson's family were permitted to use service station bathrooms and take out bank loans. Her family moved to a majority white neighborhood in Tucson, Arizona, where she attended Miles Elementary School. A dutiful child, Johnson recalls how her mother beat her with an oleander switch when she misbehaved.

African American television journalists--Texas--Dallas--Interviews.

Television news anchors--Texas--Dallas--Interviews.

Women television journalists--Texas--Dallas--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Iola Johnson, Section  
A2006\_088\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:47 2006/05/03

Iola Johnson attended a Baptist church until her father died, when her mother left religion and sent her daughters to the First Assembly of God. As a child, Johnson enjoyed field trips to the museum and the symphony, and aspired to be a short story author. During her time at Tucson's Mansfeld Junior High School, she watched 'American Bandstand.' She also had her first close African American friend. Mansfeld had few black students, and only one black teacher, who attempted to pass for white. Johnson was on her way to a Mansfeld classmate's funeral when she learned of the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy over the radio. She attended Tucson High School, where she played tennis, studied modern dance, and rarely socialized due to her mother's overprotectiveness. Johnson heard of the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. while at her job at Sears, Roebuck and Co. While studying at the University of Arizona, she worked as a stenographer, bank teller and telephone service representative.

Video Oral History Interview with Iola Johnson, Section  
A2006\_088\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:32 2006/05/03

Iola Johnson was the first African American representative at a telephone company in Tucson, Arizona. She enrolled at the University of Arizona, where she majored in journalism and political science and took her first black studies class in college from Rubin Salter, Jr. Upon graduating, Johnson was hired as the first African American and first female writer for a television news station in Tucson. After three years there, she was recruited in 1973 to become a weekend anchor at WFAA-TV in Dallas, Texas, where she was later promoted to primetime weekday anchor. Johnson worked at WFAA for thirteen years, and led her workplace's salary negotiations. She recalls covering politicians like Morris K. Udall and John Tower. In 1986, Johnson left the television industry to open a salon and boutique with her sister, Horacetene

Johnson Shults. She eventually returned to news as an anchor in St. Louis, Missouri. She moved back to Texas to found the KKDA Radio-AM news department, and then worked as an anchor for KTVT-TV.

Video Oral History Interview with Iola Johnson, Section  
A2006\_088\_001\_004, TRT: 0:19:58 2006/05/03

Iola Johnson traveled to Ethiopia and Somalia in 1980 to report on the refugee crisis for WFAA-TV in Dallas, Texas. Her report was picked up by national news programs. Johnson and Tracy Rowlett, whom Johnson first worked with at WFAA, were a highly popular anchor team at KTVT-TV in Fort Worth, Texas. Despite her popularity, Johnson was fired to make way for a younger, Latina replacement, even though the new anchor did not perform as well in screen tests. Johnson stayed with KTVT and hosted a weekly community affairs program, 'Positively Texas.' She never married, but helped to raise the children of her two sisters, Smithie Johnson Dunn and Horacetene Johnson Shults. Johnson talks about her lifelong interest in horses, which began on her parents' and grandparents' ranches. She describes how she would like to be remembered, and offers advice to those interested in pursuing careers in journalism. Johnson concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.