

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

---

## 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, Colonel Stone, 1918-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 23, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:17:40).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Labor activist and railroad worker Colonel Stone Johnson (1918 - 2012 ) worked as part of a security detail for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights that was designed to protect important leaders and meeting places. Johnson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 23, 2007, in Birmingham, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_108
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Colonel Stone Johnson was born on September 9, 1918, in Hayneville, Alabama, to Fannie and Colonel Johnson. Johnson's family moved to Birmingham, Alabama, when he was a small child; there he attended Slater School, and graduated from Lincoln School in 1939. While in high school, Johnson began working on the weekends for the Bowden trucking company; after graduation, he continued there full-time. Johnson was then hired to work at the L & M Rail Road Company, where he became the first African American union representative; in this role he worked to equalize working conditions for African American employees, who were often discriminated against. Johnson remained employed by the L & M Rail Road Company for thirty-nine years.

In 1956, Johnson met Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth and became active in the Civil Rights Movement after civil rights leaders formed the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) in response to Alabama state officials outlawing the NAACP for its supportive role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

After the bombing of Bethel Baptist Church and the parsonage where Shuttlesworth resided on Christmas Eve in 1958, Johnson became a part of a security detail for the ACMHR and worked to protect black leaders, their homes, and churches from Ku Klux Klan attacks. On one occasion, Johnson and an associate were instrumental in removing ignited dynamite from the Bethel Baptist Church, preventing further destruction and possible loss of life. In 1977, Johnson and one other witness testified against J.B Stoner, chairman of the National States Rights Party, the political arm of the Ku Klux Klan; Stoner was found guilty of conspiring to bomb the Bethel Baptist Church in 1955.

Johnson remained in Birmingham with Beatrice, his wife of over sixty-five years.

Colonel Johnson passed away on January 19, 2012.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Colonel Stone Johnson was conducted by Denise Gines on March 23, 2007, in Birmingham, Alabama, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Labor activist and railroad worker Colonel Stone Johnson (1918 - 2012 ) worked as part of a security detail for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights that was designed to protect important leaders and meeting places.

---

## 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®.

---

## 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, Colonel Stone, 1918-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Johnson, Colonel Stone, 1918- --Interviews

---

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## Occupations:

Community Activist

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

---

## 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 Colonel Stone Johnson, March 23, 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 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).

---

## 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.

---

## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson, Section A2007\_108\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Colonel Stone Johnson was born on September 9, 1918 in Hayneville, Alabama to Fannie Johnson and Colonel Johnson. His maternal family lived on Hayneville's Hawthorne plantation, where his grandfather had been enslaved. Johnson's father was also born in Haynesville, and became a cement finisher

after graduating from Alabama's State Normal School for Colored Students. Johnson was raised in Birmingham, Alabama, where his family lived at the edge of the white neighborhood. He attended the Slater School until the fourth grade, when he graduated to the Lincoln School. Because of his dark skin tone, Johnson experienced prejudice at school, where he was rejected from the football team; and was later denied work through the Works Progress Administration, one of the few jobs available during the Great Depression. Instead, he became a truck driver at Bobby Bowden's packing company, where his wages were a fourth of what his white coworkers received.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson, Section A2007\_108\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Colonel Stone Johnson worked on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, where whites were given better pay, and authority over their black coworkers. Although African Americans were barred from the union, a few highly skilled black machinists were admitted, including Johnson. He was later asked to serve on the union board, where he fought against the railroad company's discriminatory hiring and employment practices. In reprisal, a white supervisor revoked Johnson's exemption from military service during World War II. Johnson was drafted, and had completed part of his training at Fort Benning, Georgia by the time the superintendent reinstated his exemption. Johnson also experienced racial discrimination outside of work, in segregated Birmingham, Alabama; and, when a union leader asked him to help guard the civil rights meetings held at the local black churches, Johnson agreed. He was introduced to Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and became involved in Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson, Section A2007\_108\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Colonel Stone Johnson attended the weekly meetings of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, which were led by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. After Shuttlesworth's home was bombed by white segregationists on Christmas Eve in 1958, Johnson organized volunteers to guard the house and the Bethel Baptist Church, where Shuttlesworth was pastor. Johnson also became one of Shuttlesworth's personal bodyguards; and, in this role, helped retrieve Shuttlesworth's children from the police in Gadsden, Alabama, where they had been arrested for sitting in the front of a bus, despite a federal order to desegregate public transportation. In Birmingham, Johnson took part in the civil rights march during which Shuttlesworth was attacked with a fire hose by Police Commissioner Bull Connor. Shortly after, Johnson escorted Shuttlesworth from the hospital to a meeting with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., where Shuttlesworth insisted that the demonstration continue in spite of the police commissioner's actions.

Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson, Section A2007\_108\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Colonel Stone Johnson met his wife, Beatrice Yancey Johnson, in 1938. They married in 1941; and, together, became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama. There, Johnson was turned away from registering to vote three times by a local judge, who used a test with impossible questions to disenfranchise African Americans. Even so, Johnson continued his voting rights efforts, and helped transport black voters to the polls. He succeeded in registering to vote during the 1950s. Johnson retired in 1979, after a forty-year career at the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. In 2000, the Federal Bureau of

Investigation reopened the investigation into the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1963, and Johnson followed the trial closely. Johnson remembers the March on Washington, and the accomplishments of civil rights leaders like Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian and Reverend Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker. He also describes his hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Colonel Stone Johnson, Section A2007\_108\_001\_005, TRT: 0:21:50 ?

Colonel Stone Johnson served as a guard at Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth's Bethel Baptist Church, which was the headquarters of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama. While on duty at night, he often noticed Ku Klux Klan member J.B. Stoner circling the church in a yellow cab, and recognized him on other occasions due to his limp. In the late 1970s, Stoner was tried for the bombing of the Bethel Baptist Church in 1958, and Johnson was one of the few witnesses willing to testify against him. Stoner was convicted of the bombing in 1980, and served less than four years in prison. Despite his experiences of racial discrimination, Johnson made a life for himself in Birmingham, where he bought a house on a large lot, and worked at the Louisville and Nashville Railroad for over forty years. He describes how he would like to be remembered, his reasons for sharing his story and his message to future generations. Johnson concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.